

EVERY "BOY SCOUT" SHOULD READ THIS

AMERICAN WEEKLY INDIAN

BY COLONEL SPENCER DAIR

HOUNDED BY RED MEN.





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HOUNDED BY RED MEN OR The Road Agents of Porcupine River

By Col. Spencer Dair

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

NIHILLALAU—If there is an outlaw of more evil reputation than this thug in all the great North-West country it would be hard to find him. A Dog-Rib Indian, educated at an Indian Mission school at Great Slave Lake, he became a pirate there, and was forced to fly to Yukon territory, British North America, where in its farthest Northern corner on the border line of Alaska, the thug heads a band of outlaws, half white and half Indian. His deeds of blood cause him to be called "The Red Terror." He wages a bitter war against any one representing civilization and the arts of peace, and tries to keep out of the bailiwick he has marked as his Kingdom of the Gun-man, every farmer, ranch-man, trapper or hunter. How he at length was swallowed up in civilization's wave, is a study of the usual end of a desperado.

EITELWOLF—The truculent, sneaking white-man, second in command in the Nihillalau outlaw band. He was ignorant, brutal, but brave and filled his narrow sphere as a bad-man of the prairie, and landed in a narrow grave with his boots on, in true outlaw style.

RICHARD LOXA—A silent son of the soil. In his great Prairie Schooner, he toiled through mountain fastness, up grim heights, over fiercely swollen rivers, across wide prairies, until at length he wrested a splendid ranch from the primeval forest. How he thus gained the enmity of Nihillalau, the outlaw, narrowly escaped death, saw the fruit of years burned by the bandits, while he fled for his life, and yet how he won in spite of all odds, tell the old, old story of the Winning of the North-West for the civilized man in no measured terms. Dick's life was a grand one filled with exciting and hair-breadth escapes from many dangers.

BARBARA LOXA—Just a pretty, winsome, brave frontier girl. She once was forced to gamble for her life with a bandit chief. Her loss of her life, her rescue by a doughty young man when about to be buried in a living tomb, and her wonderful escape from the real loss of the life she had

gambled away, is one of the most thrilling tales of British North America. Barbara Loxa was a girl with a brave heart and she aided her brother Dick in the Winning of the North-West in a manner well worthy of perusal in these pages.

GERARD TAFT—Inspector Taft, if you please, of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, is a brave chap, and handsome as he is brave. His rescue of Barbara Loxa, when she was captured and her life was forfeit to Nihillalau, the outlaw, was a fine, dashing bit of work. But exciting as was this rescue, the tale of his long fight to uproot the bandit gang, if anything, makes red blood tingle faster.

NORMAN YORK—Constable in the Royal North-West Mounted Police force. A right good chap who insists that he isn't English because he is Irish. He, too, knows how to fight, and the way he assisted in the "cleaning up" of the outlaws led by the Dog-Rib Indian, Nihillalau, is a poem in prose.

SILENT SOL—A Scout of the prairie and the mountain. Although he got his name because he talked so much, one day he talked to a purpose, and that was when he told Gerard Taft how to reach the outlaws' lair.

BUCKSKIN PETE—A roaring bully of the outlaw camp.

MUSCODO OF THE LONG KNIFE—An Indian thug member of the Nihillalau gang of bandits.

QUICK-SHOT AL—An outlaw member of the Indian-White gang of bandits.

BUFFALO ED—A bandit with a cruel heart and a ready revolver.

WHITE FEATHER—An Indian outlaw.

GRIZZLY-BEAR—An Indian member of the Nihillalau bandit gang.

BOOMERANG JOE—This man was an outlaw, and in history he is known as "The Road Agent of Porcupine River." He played a wide part in this true tale and is of interest as a curious type of bad-man.

THE TOMAHAWK—A savage Indian, assistant to Nihillalau.

CHAPTER I.

THE RED TERRORS' RAID.

Inspector Gerard Taft and Constable Norman York of the Royal North-West Mounted Police stopped as

if some magnetic current had made them aware of a horrible crisis.

"Look there!" cried Inspector Taft.

His hand pointed toward the silvery waters of the Porcupine River in the wildness of the forests that

mark the line between Yukon territory, British North America, and the Great Alaskan country of the United States.

Constable York shaded his eyes with his hands.

The shining mountains, the verdure covered earth, the clear air all seemed to turn the sun into a ball of copper that dazzled as it slanted down upon the scene.

"It's smoke," muttered York, after a long inspection of the spiral cloud that wound among the tree-tops to finally sweep into a filmy vapor in the shimmering blue vault of the sky.

"Smoke, all right," added Taft. "But why?"

"Why what?"

"Why is it there? I don't know of anything over that part of this district that would cause smoke that comes without doubt from a big fire hidden behind the forest there at our right."

York nodded.

"Of course there's smoke there, and likewise of course, the smoke comes from a fire. If it is a forest fire it's up to us to try and put it out. If we don't millions of dollars worth of valuable lumber would be destroyed."

"That's true. But that isn't a forest fire. It's not wide spread enough. It does not leap from tree and tree to shrub, and back to engulf a tree again, with that peculiar spiral motion that forest fires usually have—no, it is not a forest fire."

"What do you think it may be?"

"I don't know—yet stay. It is in the vicinity of the Loxa outfit, isn't it?"

Norman took his bearings from the sun.

"By George," he cried, "I think it is."

"Let us see," rejoined Gerard. "We are about a mile from the Fort Davidson trail, aren't we?"

"Just about. Over there to the North you can see the trail wind."

"Yes. I see it. It goes back to whence we came—the peaceful Hudson's Bay Company's out-lying trading post for furs and gold."

"That is, they buy furs from trappers and gold from miners."

"They get more furs than gold."

"That is true. However, we won't discuss the Hudson's Bay Company but we will get along and see what that smoke is like."

"It's like smoke, isn't it?"

Gerard screwed up his mouth.

"All smoke is exactly alike—to the tenderfoot in the North-West," he joked.

"I'm not much of a tenderfoot. I've walked portages up in this country for about a year now, and that would seem to insure me from being called a tenderfoot by an old seasoned North-Westerner like you."

"Don't mean to have you get your back up, Norman, but, you know, my good fellow that it requires years for any white man to read these forests, and mountains, rivers, and lakes, indefinite trackless wastes, and sunny glades, arctic cold, and always the everlasting wildness that makes up this part of England's possessions," replied Gerard.

"Poetical cuss, aren't you?" rejoined Norman. "Like the game up here in this corner of the world so well that you are willing to do any old thing in the way of hard work to keep in the game,—now isn't that so?"

"You are right. None of the city life for me. Give me my North-West. It's the life in the open, and why men pin themselves down to a routine of daily dullness in cities when out here everything is free, open, and at the beck and call of he who can fight, hunt and work, is something that passes my feeble understanding."

"A poet! What de ye think of that? A poet of the North-West. For sale, sir, bound in calf (his natural color) at all bookstores for 99 cents, former price having been one dollar."

Gerard laughed.

He dug his spurs into the sides of his big gray horse and at a smart pace loped down the trail which ran, it appeared, in the direction of the whirl of smoke.

Nearly six feet high, spare, almost raw-boned, but with an alert carriage, that showed his masterful disposition, Gerard Taft was a picture of a model half-woodsman, half scout that made up the major part of the ranks of the formidable body of men, the Royal North-West Mounted Police of which he was a member.

In times of stress, the countenance of Taft was grave, thoughtful, and penetrating. He was then earnest in manner, and had a trick of contracting or knitting his brows over his black eyes which gave him at times the appearance of severity.

Norman York was almost as tall as his companion and best friend in the ranks of the organization of which he was a member.

He was stouter than Taft, was brown haired and blue-eyed, a rather striking combination, but he was somewhat given to sarcastic utterances, and while his face showed imagination, acuteness, and dexterity, he had not the sagacity of his superior officer, nor his tempered boldness; although each man was as brave as men could be.

Both wore the brilliant, and yet pleasantly comfortable uniform of the North-West police, and each was armed with rifle and revolvers, of the highest possible caliber, and latest pattern.

They were two men able to take care of themselves and to uphold all the law the country held.

There was not much law but what there was of it in Yukon territory the two men had skill and ability, and bravery to uphold; sometimes they needed all three attributes for any success in the life-work they had adopted.

"I have an idea," Gerard finally said as he and his companion loped onward.

"Don't let it escape," replied Norman. "There are signs now that there is to be a hard winter in spite of this pleasant summer morning. Keep your ideas. You will need them to dig yourself out of the snow-drifts soon."

Gerard did not answer this sally.

His eyes were intent on the smoke which was growing in volume as the men approached it.

"By thunder!" cried Gerard a moment later as the two men rounded a sharp curve in the trail.

"It's the Loxa Ranch that is on fire," cried Norman in return.

He clapped spurs to his horse and like a whirlwind dashed down the trail toward the smoke.

Gerard followed him, also spurring his horse to renewed exertion.

The men raced neck and neck to within a hundred feet of the scene which was thrilling in the extreme.

A low adobe single storied house, but which took up a great space of ground in spite of its lack of height, was blazing fiercely.

At one side several barns made of logs, rough hewn, was also on fire, the burning crops within the barn, making the thick volume of smoke that had first attracted the notice of Taft.

Not a sign of life could be seen.

The two men gazed in amazement at the scene.

They could hear the crackling of the fire, and their eyes watched the dense cloud of smoke rising from the flames.

That was all.

No one was to be seen engaged in desperate attempts to quell the flames.

There were no shouting men about trying to pour water on the burning buildings.

The entire scene suggested something unearthly, remote, alone.

A glance told Taft that there was no hope of saving the burning buildings.

He therefore stood puzzling out in his mind the causes that led to the fire as well as the absence from the scene of any human being.

"That's a funny sight," said York in an awe-struck voice. "Is this the Loxa Ranch?"

"Yes."

"Who owns it?"

"Richard Loxa, and he had made quite a place of it, hadn't he?"

Norman's eyes took in the spaces wrested from the forests, and saw that possibly a hundred and thirty-five acres had been cleared and put in pretty good shape for cultivation.

The standing crops in the fields, where they were marked off by split rail-fences veering hither and thither like gigantic straddle-bugs, showed that Loxa had been a good farmer, for the vast stillness of the sounds of human kind indicated that Loxa was not at his home when the flames broke out.

"Where's Loxa?" questioned Norman when his mind had grasped all the pitiful story of a man's fight with nature.

"Dunno."

"Who's Loxa?"

"Dunno much about him. He came into this region about five years ago. He bull-whacked his way in."

Norman understood.

A picture of a wagon, with a large white-canvass top and four patient oxen drawing it, "inching along" day by day from the far away settlements of the frontier towns of the country to this solitary spot where the driver of the outfit at length settled down and began his fight for fortune, which wild beast, wilder men, wild woods, and solitary days and nights of toil made almost an impossible task, came to the eyes of both men.

"Well, Loxa put up a good fight," went on Norman. "He seems to have had sand and he forced the forest to give up his land, and made of the wild land a fine farm."

"And now——"

Gerard's gesture showed his meaning as he swept his hand toward the burning farm-buildings.

"Did Loxa live here alone?" asked Norman.

"No. His sister lived with him."

"An elderly girl?"

"No. A young one."

"About how old?"

"Twenty."

"Pretty?"

"Very."

"Colored hair?"

"Bronze-brown."

"Eyes?"

"Brown."

"Good form?"

"I know perfectly well that you're guying me and if you don't stop I'll bat you one right between the eyes. Understand?" rejoined Gerard.

Norman laughed.

"I didn't mean to, but you are so preternaturally grave, Gerard," Norman added. "It was enough to cause any man to poke fun at you."

"No offense," cried Gerard. "I know your sardonic disposition, and your heart of gold, and I'll forgive you. There's little to tell you about the Loxa family save that they have lived here as you see for some years. They came from—I don't know, now I come to think about it. They are missing and their home is on fire. Why, I don't know, but Norman, I smell a crime here. Dick Loxa is not absent for nothing. Neither is his sister Barbara, and a nicer girl never lived. These two people have been struggling hard to make a hearty foot-hold for themselves here—now look!"

"Hard luck!" rejoined Norman. "Burned out, clean and slick."

"But where are they?"

"Dunno."

"That's what's bothering me. They are fifty miles from Fort Davidson on Canada's side of the frontier here, and several hundred from Fort Tanana, the nearest United States fort on the Alaska side—and there's not much between here and either point but trappers, or hunters—yes, that's the question? Where are the Loxa's?"

The idea was turned over by Norman in his mind.

"By thunder!" he cried. "You are right! There's a crime stalking here. *Some one has set those buildings on fire!*"

"No question of that in my mind. But staying here and talking about it isn't going to help matters. Let us move cautiously forward and see if we can make any discoveries. The flames are under too much headway to stop."

Gerard, as soon as he had finished speaking, urged his horse forward although the beast was snorting and rearing at the sight of the alarming flames and smoke.

The trembling animal ridden by Norman tried in vain to escape the reeling conflagration, and snorting in terror finally unwillingly bore his rider forward.

"Let's circle the house first," said Gerard.

The men did so.

Yet there was still no sign of a living person or animal.

The men halted on the side opposite the smoke away from the wind.

While they were starting about over by a spring of clear water Taft saw a huddled shape.

"Ah!" he cried.

He pushed his horse toward the spring followed immediately by Norman.

There lay a man, face down in the mud, dead, and with a patch of blood that made a red smudge upon the brilliant green of the grass upon which his sightless eyes were pressed.

The dead man was naked—save for a cloth of red-flannel wrapped about his loins.

He was painted all over in uncouth stripes of vermillion, black and green, through which shone his coppery-colored skin.

His black hair was still sticky with grease-fat from a bear.

A long feather taken from an eagle was twisted in the dead man's hair.

Around his neck he wore a collar of Arctic white-bear claws, uncouth, but plainly bringing to the mind of the two men who gazed down at him all the facts that were hidden in the dead face turned away from them and buried in the sod.

"An Indian!" whispered Gerard.

"Shot through the head—see, there's where the bullet came out!" replied Norman.

"Nihillalau is up," mournfully replied Gerard.

"The Red Terror has broken out. This man died in the Red Terrors' Raid."

CHAPTER II.

A SHOT FROM AMBUSH.

A shot rang out upon the air.

The wail of a rifle bullet came shrieking along toward Inspector Gerard Taft, and Constable Norman York of the Royal North-West Mounted Police force, just as Gerard had analyzed the facts told him as he gazed at the form of the dead Indian.

But the whine of the bullet like an entire hive of angry bees passed over the heads of the two men without hitting them.

The way they met this assassin's attack was characteristic of their thorough frontier training.

Without touching stirrup or bridle the men vaulted to their saddles.

One hand rested for a moment on the necks of their horses; then they were seated astride of each beast; and the animals were laying zig-zag courses back up the trail toward Fort Davidson.

There was a sudden addition to the shrieking whines as other rifles than the first one fired at them gave tongue, but the zig-zag course of the gallant men, apparently aimless, yet conducted with skill, as the riders lay far along the sides of their running horses away from the line of fire, thus shielding their bodies by those of the horses, from the fire of the concealed enemy, spoke well of their military training.

It would hardly have been thought possible that two men could be fired at from a fringe of woods two hundred feet or so away, and not be hit at the first shot, standing close together as they were.

But the haste with which the shot was fired saved their lives.

The aim was bad.

The men had escaped the moment they heard the shot go whining by them by means of their wonderful ability as horsemen.

It was a call made upon their ability indicative of the life they were leading.

They met it with no more emotion than the average man wheels away from a city curb to escape the mud-bespattering automobile that lurches toward him.

And with little thought of the danger they had passed, as soon as they were away from any possible attack, the men turned to each other.

"Didn't get pinked, did you?" asked Gerard.

"No. Never touched me," answered Norman. "But how do you translate that dead Indian?"

"He? Oh, he is, or rather he was, for he is a very good, and dead Injun now, was a member of the outlaw band of Nihillalau, the Red Terror."

"Gosh! Is that brute up again?"

"No question of that."

"Hard lines, isn't it?"

"You bet. I hate the welter of blood and fighting we have got to go through before this fellow is squelched."

"It's up to us to squelch him?"

"It's up to us, and what help we may get from Fort Davidson."

"A lot of help we can get from that fort fifty miles away!"

"Well, all right! If we can't get help we shall have to do the best we can, but we have got to put down this uprising, or we are forever shamed and discredit is brought on the Mounted Police."

"Which means that there is going to be some smart fighting presently in which a young man, named Gerard Taft, and another named Norman York, are going to engage, and which further means that one or the other of us, maybe both, may find numerous holes in one's pelt into which some one has sent some lead from a certain weapon, known, and called, and understood to be, to wit, one rifle, or revolver, held with intent to kill."

Norman winked as he spoke.

Gerard more sober minded looked forward to the work ahead.

"Well, it's no fun facing Nihillalau and his gang," remarked Gerard.

"You know more about him than I do—tell me about him."

"First he is an Indian, next he is an Indian, lastly he is an Indian," came the swift reply.

"That's about all you need tell about his habits and disposition."

"Yes. I guess that covers him."

"He is all Indian. Or in other words, he is sly, sneaking, treacherous, cunning, brave, drunken, immoral, thieving, and generally a nuisance to the community, and not of any earthly use to himself."

"About that."

"What's his tribe?"

"He is a Dog-Rib."

"What's he doing out here? This isn't Dog-Rib country."

"No. His country is about Fort Rae, in Mackenzie territory, along the shores of Great Slave Lake. He

was a member of a band there, the sweetest gang of outlaws you ever saw. They were cleaned up one day, and this thieving skate jumped the territory and came out here."

"Making trouble here, of course, from the beginning."

"Worse than that. He came here in a wave of trouble. No sooner had he struck the territory than things began to break loose. Some one held up, or held out, I should say, a mail sack containing bullion going from Dawson to Whitehorse."

"Did Nihillalau do it?"

"Not proven yet, but suspected. Then miners down in the Conrad District began to be held up by some infernal Road Agent."

"That's bad."

"Isn't it? Nearly every report that came in described the Road Agent as being 'probably an Indian.'"

"No one sure?"

"No. The man that held up miners was always disguised. Wore a mask. Wore hunter's garb. Take ten hunters up here and they all dress alike, white, Indian or half-breed."

"That's so. Same kind of short tunic, or jacket, wide felt hat, leggins, moccasins, or high boots,—there you are."

"That's it. I interviewed every one that was held up, but not one was able to come to the front and swear out a warrant for Nihillalau's arrest."

"That's why you left the police post at Fort Dawson suddenly a few months ago?"

"That was why. Been here ever since, and haven't got much of anywhere in my investigations. Nihillalau is still at large, and merely under suspicion. I confess I haven't got a case against him yet."

"Well, you think he is behind this burning of the Loxa Ranch?"

"I do. Nihillalau has been surrounding himself with a gamey gang of outlaws for the past six months. I expected something overt was coming."

Norman looked his amazement.

"Why didn't you get a good chance at the Injun and blow his head off? A good gun-fight would settle things here quickly."

"I tried that knowing how a dead Indian clarifies the atmosphere. But I didn't come within ten feet any time of the man."

"Were you once in ten feet of him?"

"Yes."

"Why, then, didn't you get him?"

"Didn't know it was he. I was riding along a dark road about a mile from Fort Davidson on my way out here when a man hailed me. It was dark and I couldn't see him. He asked me which way he ought to go for the Fort Tanana trail. I told him—later I learned the man was Nihillalau."

"Whew! What a chance!"

"Wasn't it? He is suspected of holding up a traveller on the same trail, you know, that same night."

Norman broke into a gust of laughter.

"That was funny? You hunting for the chap, he within ten feet of you in a dark night, when you could have snuffed him off the earth in a twinkling, and you not know it?" cried Norman.

"Was funny, wasn't it?" rejoined Gerard.

"Rather."

"Well, I then found out that Nihillalau had gathered about him about as mean a gang of gun-fighters and bad men that the North-West can afford to carry—so I sent back to Fort Davidson for you, knowing that you had abilities that I thought would make up the missing link in the campaign that I must wage against this bloodthirsty Indian."

Norman York made a low bow.

"Thank you," he mocked. "It's like you to remember your old friend and fresh junior in the service that you send for him, when the bullets begin to hum. It's a compliment that I shall not forget. But tell me, Gerard, what about this Nihillalau? If he is a Dog-Rib Indian are all his men Indians?"

"No. That's the funny part of it. You know how a white-gun-fighter looks down on a red-brother? Well, in this case this chap Nihillalau has not only attracted to him many Indians, but many half-breeds and a lot of white bad-men."

"Whom, for instance?"

"Well, there's Eitelwolf."

Norman whistled.

"Eitelwolf?" he said. "He is a pretty bad actor, that chap. He is from Athabasca way, isn't he?"

Gerard nodded.

"Funny, isn't it," added Norman, "but with the advance of civilization the gun-man, the bravo, the pirate, the assassin, the sea-rover, the thug, and hold-up men are being pushed further and further to the North? If it keeps on there won't be anything left even in the North-West for the cut-throat to do?"

"That's so," rejoined Gerard. "Civilization for its own protection won't stand the outlaw or the drunkard. They are no use in the world's making any more."

"They may not be any use in the making but they certainly are troublesome when made. I think you said we were liable to have a fight with the outlaws of Nihillalau's gang of bandits?"

"I did," replied Gerard.

"Well, I guess you are right—for here they come in force!"

As Norman spoke there trailed into view all the leading part of the outlaw gang, headed by Nihillalau with Eitelwolf at his side and right behind him other members of the bandit horde.

The outlaws were riding in a sort of half circle pretty well spread out.

It was their intention to attack the two fighting men by closing this circle around them.

Gerard saw the plan quickly.

"Get back toward the forest, Norman," Gerard said in his usual conversational tone, "don't let them push their men around behind us."

Gerard raised his weapon as he spoke and sent the first shot in the battle of two against twenty flying at an outlaw who was trying to push in behind him.

CHAPTER III.

THE OUTLAW'S VIEWPOINT.

A man with a huge beard and a fierce moustache, whose long hair floated down his shoulders, coarse and

black, sat on a splendid black horse, which in an agony of impatience was pawing the trail which leads between Fort Davidson in British North America and Fort Tanana in the United States.

The man's blue trousers were stuffed in a pair of top-boots. The trousers were faced in the inside of the legs with buck-skin, so that they would stand the constant horseback riding to which they were subjected.

The figure wore a red-woolen shirt, no suspenders, but a heavy belt around his waist acted for the same purpose and also held a fine Army revolver, which swung at his right hip, with the hammer to the front. Projecting from his boot was a horn-handled bowie knife.

Except for his copper-colored skin, he would have passed for a prospecting gold miner.

In fact nine out of ten men in the North-West were better armed and better dressed than this silent figure, whose Spanish spurs with tiny iron chains and clogs jingled with every step he took. They were jingling now as his horse danced about in anxiety to be going.

There was nothing about the man that suggested in any way an ordinary figure, nor did it suggest an extraordinary one.

He was simply a man who looked like a very commonplace man.

If you had seen him you would have said to yourself, "there goes a man, a gold prospector, a miner, a man of the pick and shovel" and would have dismissed the entire subject from your mind.

But you would have made a mistake.

For the man was a personality in the North-West.

He was Nihillalau, the Indian outlaw, and thug leader of a desperate band of criminals.

He was a man who stood ready any moment to back his judgment with his gun, and thus he had fought himself up from a despised youth as a mean member of the Dog-Rib tribe of Indians, to be the leader of the gang of outlaws he now commanded; and it was his proud boast that "There wasn't a man in his gang but had a price on his head, and didn't dare show himself at any settlement in the North-West."

It was sure that the Indian bandit was a leader that was worshipped by his men.

"He is always with his gun in his hand ready to do business with you," was given by one member of his band as a reason for liking him.

"He ain't afraid o' nothin'," remarked a second outlaw.

"He's squaar'," cried a third, "he divvy's up wit' de boys, arter any' tin' he pulls over."

There was nothing alarming about the great outlaw, however, to the casual observer.

His face was rather broad across his low cheek bones and what could be seen of his lips showed that they were straight and thin.

These characteristics made up a face that men who studied faces, usually kept away from.

The man's eyes were prominent and tragical with the tragic fate of his Indian race, but there was a snakey gleam every now and then that showed that when anger or revenge actuated him he would be a terrible man to cope with.

"Whoa!" cried the outlaw to his horse. "Stand still!"

The voice in which he spoke, was low, sweet, silky. Its tone was even.

There was the soft graces of a courtly world in the manner in which the words were spoken.

The set of the broad shoulders, the free swagger like a buccaneer, belied the soft tones, however.

In fact Nihillalau the outlaw was without question a man out of the usual type of border ruffians.

While the outlaw spoke a man came riding toward him.

That Nihillalau knew the on-comer was apparent for he made no move toward his revolver, which lay where his hand could get it, and the outlaw leader was "great on the quick draw," all his friends, and all his enemies acknowledged so as the opinion was unanimous it must have been true.

In this paradise for outlaws and desperadoes where there was hardly a semblance of law, where violence was the rule, and force the only recognized authority, if a man did not reach for his gun when another man came into view, his death followed as a matter of course.

If, therefore, no gun was drawn it was safe to assume that the man was a friend.

That this was so in the case of Nihillalau the first words of the bandit evidenced.

"What have you discovered?" said Nihillalau in his soft, silky-toned accents.

"'Bout all thar is ter tell ye," boomed the deep voice of the new-comer.

He was short, squat with Holland Dutch written over him, and "behaved as such."

His blue-black beard cut short, and stained yellow made him look like the celebrated pirate who has gone down to history as "Blue-Beard."

Otherwise the man was of great strength as his wide shoulders and broad hairy arms showed. His hair was iron-gray showing he was past the early life of a man, and he wore a deer-skin hunting shirt, fringed with dyed porcupine quills, deer-skin leather-like breeches, which were worn tight to his skin, as if he had been melted and poured into them, high boots and the inevitable tinkling Spanish spur.

A coon-skin hat was perched rakishly on his head and he wore the usual heavy caliber revolver at his right hip, and slung over his shoulder was a long-barreled rifle.

His name was Eitelwolf, and he was more wild than any wolf that ranged the mountains and the country about him.

Second in leadership to Nihillalau, this man, was as implacable as he, and together they made up the type of the worst men that the territory contained from point of devilishness.

"Tell all there is and then I will know as much as you," cried Nihillalau.

"Sartin'. So hyar goes," boomed the deep-bass voice of Eitelwolf. "We did as you ordered."

"That was what I presumed you would do," said the outlaw chief with his slow, sweet smile, "I am fortunate. I am well obeyed."

Eitelwolf laughed his great ruffian roar of merri-ment.

The sound went booming through the woods.

"Ho! Ho! Ho! W'y man, ef we didn't obey ye, we'd git killed by ye in two flashes o' thet thar gun ye carry so car'less like," howled Eitelwolf. "Say we 'ud look fine er disobeyin' ye!"

"Oh surely not as bad as that," protested the bandit leader.

Eitelwolf roared again.

"Waal," he added, "We won't talk erbout thet. Wot I've got ter tell ye is thet the tricks done."

A gleam of savage pleasure stole into Nihillalau's eyes.

"Good!" he cried.

"Waal, not so good perhaps as ye mount think."

"Why not?"

"Nawthin'. I tuk er half doz in uv the gang an' we went an' shot up thet thar ranch o' th' Loxas."

"That was right. That's what you were told to do."

"Yass. We did ut ter the King's taste."

"Very well. What next?"

"We shot all uv the stock."

"That was a good move."

"We set them thar barns afire."

"Excellent!"

"Then we sot the 'dobe house afire."

"Good."

"Waal, p'raps twas good, p'raps it want so good."

"Why?"

"I had them boys a hidin' eout in thet thar clear-in' an' uv cose I expected thet them Loxas ud rush eout wen they seen the fire a-blazin' in them barns and that thar heouse."

"Of course they would rush out of the house—then you filled the fellow Dick Loxa full of lead and captured the girl—good work, my Eitelwolf!"

Eitelwolf scratched his head woelessly.

He looked rather shame-faced as he continued.

"Waal, that was th' pro-grum we fellers had laid down, but some how er 'nother we didn't make that thar raffle."

A dull red shot over the copper-colored face of Nihillalau.

His eyes began to blaze.

The silky tones left his voice. He spoke in a swift hard tone of rage and disappointment.

"You are not going to tell me that you missed the Loxas?" he asked with a ringing death-note in his voice.

"Naw we didn't miss 'em," meekly replied Eitelwolf. "We didn't hev no chanst ter miss 'em!"

"What?" snapped the leader. "Had no chance to miss them—what do you mean?"

"Now, Nihillalau," softly and beseechingly said Eitelwolf, "they ain't no call fer ye to git angry. We ain't ter blame."

"You're not to blame for *what*?" said the leader.

"Them Loxas didn't git by us."

"They didn't escape! Hear the man? If they did not escape why did you miss killing them? What was my long planned raid good for if you did not kill them?"

"Neou, don't git mad. We didn't git them folks 'cause theys want thar wen we raided the ranch."

Nihillalau struck his spurs into the sides of his mettled horse in his anger.

His face was transfixed by his evil passions.

The frightened horse reared and plunged and for a time the conversation was suspended while the outlaw leader curbed the animal.

When the trembling horse was reduced to some semblance of obedience to his master's will once more, all traces of anger had faded from Nihillalau's face.

Once more he spoke in his drawling silky tones.

"Tell me how you failed," he mourned.

Eitelwolf without doubt hated to make the confession.

"Waal," he began uneasily. "We follied all uv yar in-struct-eens ez near ez we could. But thar want noawtin' ter wot we did 'cept ter burn up the Loxa Ranch and run off thar stock a killin' wot we cud not use."

"Oh?"

"Fer thar want no one ter hum. Them Loxa's hed skipped. They hed got sum heou or another news thet we was a comin', I guess, fer they want any whar ter be seen."

"Escaped?"

"Yass."

"Do you know where they went to?"

"Thar's not er trace uv em thet we kin find."

"What have you done?"

"I sent some uv our scouts up en deown thet thar trail toward Fort Tanana, one waoy an' toward Fort Davidson t'other way. An' ye knows thet thars onny them ways ter any settlemunt hyarbouts, an' them Loxas aint no woodfolk ter try ter git away frum us by a taking ter them trackless forests—w'y they'd git et up by the wild beasts in them forests in a second. They aint wood-folks, they jest farmers."

"That's why I'm after them," replied Nihillalau. "They are the first farmers to come here and dispute the earth with the forest and the wild animals in it. Man, if one man like Dick Loxa gets a foot-hold in this territory way out here, so far from the gold diggings, there will be no place for men like us. They represent law and civilization—they must be run out of this part of the country by me."

While half of what Nihillalau said was lost on Eitelwolf, he understood enough to make his anger rise.

"Them farmers hez gottter git," he roared. "Neow don' ye think thet we ain e goin' ter git them Loxas yit. They aint escaped so fer thet our boys can't find 'em."

"Hark!" cried Nihillalau. "I hear the pounding of loping horses. Into the forest! Be quick!"

A touch with his spur sent his horse bounding into the forest depths. He was followed by Eitelwolf.

In a breathless second he whirled about to see racing toward the fire that was swirling into the air over the Loxa Ranch, two horsemen each wearing the uniform of the Royal North-West Mounted Police.

"Look! Look!" cried the Indian outlaw chief. "Following the farmer comes the men whose sworn duty it is to uphold the law. We must kill those two men. We must find and kill the Loxas. We are now in a battle for our lives and our liberty. Follow me."

The outlaw leader spurred his horse at its best speed toward the remainder of his band secreted in the forest.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ESCAPE.

"Drive faster!" cried a girl.

The startling pop of a great black-snake whip echoed

through the wood as the girl's words were heard.

The four stalwart mules strained at their collars.

They were hitched in teams to a lumbering wagon, whose round canvas top showed it to be one of the prairie schooners, used always by travelers generally of the farmer kind, as method of transportation in the North-West.

The schooner's mules had a hard time in drawing the heavy wagon along, because they were off the beaten trail and were in the great forest itself.

On the rear mule seated in a saddle with high pommel and with great wooden stirrups sat Dick Loxa, whose heart was heavy.

Whenever he reached a high cleared spot in the woods he could see the embers and smoke whirling up in the air that marked the burning of the home his industry had wrenched from the forest.

"Hurry, Dick," cried the girl who sat in the wagon peering out of the canvas top.

She was a very pretty girl, but her face was white with fear.

Barbara Loxa was a girl who was worth while.

Brown hair fell over a perfect face, with sparkling brown eyes, that were set above a nose and mouth moulded for happiness and merriment.

The girl, like all women in that part of the country, wore a short-skirted suit of gray cloth, that fitted her pretty figure well. There was the gleam of a revolver in her belt. A knife peeped from the top of her tan boots.

Her face, however, showed the great mental strain under which she was held.

"I'm hurrying as fast as the mules will go, Barbara," cried Loxa, who, by the way, was the very pretty girl's brother. "Now don't get in a wax. We will get out of here some time."

"That's you, brother Dick," cried the girl. "Was there ever such a cheerful man as you? Here's our house being burned up. Our barns are already destroyed by fire and yet you say, 'Never mind, we will get out of this' as if it was the pleasantest thing in the world to lose the work of years at the hands of the Nihillalau bandits—oh, dear, I'll just give up."

"You are the bluest creature on earth," chimed in Barbara's brother. "Now what's the use? You can't change anything. This raid of those red devils has ruined me, I know, but I've made so many fresh starts in this world that I'm used to being broke. What's the use of repining?"

"You're the most exasperating man I ever knew. You are just escaped with your life, yet you look on the bright side!"

"Well, if having one's life left isn't enough to make you bright, I don't know what is? Suppose I was dead? Then I'd have a call to get blue."

The girl made no answer.

She drummed with her hand on the canvas side of the prairie schooner as she spoke.

"I'm sick of this," continued Barbara. "We've been *Hounded by Red Men* ever since I was unlucky enough to let you induce me to come here with you five years ago. It was only another story of failure. I'm sick of working like a dog to only have everything end in failure. It isn't as if you were to blame, Dick. You work hard, you're a brainy man, yet nothing ever seems to amount to anything. You just start, go ahead

awhile working like a horse, and then it all peters out. Another failure."

Dick Loxa grinned.

"We aren't so bad off as you might think," he said. "The crops are all destroyed I know, but the outlaws can't burn up the land. Our cattle has been run off but I didn't own all the cattle in the North-West. The house is burned up, but bless you, Bab, there's lots of timber in the forest back of the house to build another one. I've already been planning to make the new house better than the old one. I never liked the old one much——"

"Heaven hear the man," wailed Barbara. "Not yet safe from the murderous outlaws, yet here he is planning the new house on the not yet cold ruins of the old one! You are the most cheerful man I ever knew. But you get on my nerves. I have to be blue to maintain a cheerful balance."

A man about forty years of age who had been walking ahead of the leading mules now stopped until the rear team had caught up with him.

Dick gave a steady pull on the single rein which governed his four in hand, and the mules stopped quickly.

The man wiped his forehead.

He was clad in deer-skin from top to toe. His yellow garb seemed to melt into the forest. Twenty feet from him and he became as much a part of the woods as any wild thing in it.

He was known everywhere in the country as Silent Sol, because he never was silent for a second of his waking hours.

He talked all the while.

If you would listen to him he would talk by the yard.

If you wouldn't listen he would talk to himself.

He was, moreover, the most child-like man that ever lived in the ways of the great world, but as a master of woodcraft, stood unrivalled in the British American woods.

No one knew anything about Silent Sol's early life. But it must not have all been spent in the forest because he spoke well and was well read. Somewhere he had been to school in his younger days, but not a murmur for all his garrulousness ever told anything about his younger days.

"Well, Dick," Silent Sol said, "any way I got you along in safety so far."

"That's so," returned Dick.

Barbara's face shone with pleasure as she looked at the scout.

"Thanks to you, and to you alone, that we are alive," she said in her clear sweet voice.

"Now don't thank me child," said Sol. "I know these woods pretty well and it was just luck that I saw Nihillalau's gang hurrying along through this very forest to burn you out of house and home, and to kill you both. So I just said to myself I will beat them in that little plot so I took a short cut through the woods, warned you all, and here we are——"

"After we loaded the wagon with anything we had handy, hitched up the mules and rushed for the woods, I should think about half an hour before the red-men's raid."

"Well, my pretty one," answered Silent Sol, "we are out of danger for awhile. Don't you fret. We will win our way to safety some how. I stopped ye because there's a spring here, and it's good clear water. I thought best to rest our mules and let them graze a

bit. You can get a cold snack—but light no fire. Nihillalau is an Injun and knows how to search these woods for us. We can beat him at his own game I feel sure. But we must meet Injun deviltry with white men's common-sense. Get us something to eat—but no fire, Bab."

The girl jumped from the prairie schooner and began preparing a simple meal from the few things that had been dumped into the wagon when the alarm was given by the scout.

After the mules had been lariatied, Sol and Dick formed a committee of ways and means.

"Now, then," said Dick, whose usually smiling face was gloomy with foreboding, "I've been trying to be cheerful before Bab, and the strain is pretty heavy. I think we are in a desperate plight. What do you think of it?"

"I've had some experience in these matters and I agree with you that we are in some trouble, but really I've seen sicker dogs than we are get well."

Dick smiled.

"But you will admit that we are pretty sick?"

"Sicker than we wish we were."

"Do you know about where we are?"

"Yes."

"Where are we?"

"About five miles from your ranch."

"We have done pretty well in getting so far, haven't we?"

"Wonderfully well. It's no easy task for even four strong mules to drag this prairie schooner as far as they have done. But they've worked nobly and we have covered a lot of ground."

"No question of that. But we can't keep on this way through these woods. There's no trail here at all. It's a trackless wilderness, and if it had not been for you I would have been hopelessly lost in the first mile."

"Very true. But with me you won't be lost."

"I don't fear the loss part but I do fear the pursuit."

"So do I."

"Well, what had we better do?"

"My idea is that we can go along this way for a few miles more."

"Oh."

"You see the forest here isn't cut up by the Porcupine River—that bit of water makes a bend about two miles from here, and then runs in a sort of 'S'. We are in the hollow of the upper part of the 'S'."

"I understand."

"Now the trail we ought to be on to get to safety is right over along the top of the 'S,' you see. My plan is to keep in the bend of the 'S,' and then when we get the chance emerge into the trail and hurry toward Fort Davidson."

"We couldn't go toward Fort Tanana?"

"No. The bandits cut us off that way, but even if we could go that way I don't think it advisable to go along the trail over into the United States."

"It would be pretty far that way."

"Yes, it would. You see your ranch is the farthest north in the territory. There's nothing between us and either forest but wilderness unless you take in the few Hudson's Bay Company's forts further up toward the Arctic Ocean, and a few of the more outlying posts of the Royal North-West Mounted Police."

"That's so."

"It's hundreds of miles toward any of those points

—the only haven at all near at hand is fifty miles away at Fort Davidson."

"That fort is nothing but a Hudson's Bay trading post and a trifling little hamlet around it."

"Yes, that is so. But there's good brave hearts there that would like to eat up this Nihillalau gang of dirty outlaws. If we can make a plunge to the woods from this little cleared spot, skirt the Porcupine River along parallel to the Fort Davidson trail, until safe from pursuit, we can get back into the trail and then make a dash for the fort."

"Wouldn't it be better to cast the schooner here adrift, mount the mules and then make a ride for life toward the fort?"

"I hardly think so. This prairie schooner is best to stick to. It's all you've got left to start life anew in. You've got some fodder for us in the schooner. You've got some of your household goods—not much but a few old keepsakes, and they'll be good to start life anew with—no, better stick to the old wagon until we have to drop it—although it does seem a foolish thing to lumber ourselves up with it."

"I'm willing to quit it any time you say."

"The time isn't now it seems to me."

"Good. Then in case we are caught?"

Silent Sol spat a cud of tobacco out and took a fresh one.

"When that happens," he remarked, "we won't have to do much planning. There is a sprinklin' of about fifty men, more or less in the outlaw gang. You can figure out for yourself just how long we would last when they started in on us."

"It would be a case of back up to a rock, shoot as long as you could and die fighting?"

"Either that or howl as loud as you wanted to and then die any way."

"Well, don't tell Bab."

"Not on your life. She'd better think things are going on all right. But Dick, why in thunder did you ever settle out here in this spot that God Forgot and try to make a ranch out of it?"

"I dunno. It was a partly cleared spot by nature when I happened to ride down the trail five years ago looking for a place to start a ranch. I got it cheap and had it registered by the Land Agent of the Canadian government back at Fort Davidson and I was doing pretty well until this gang of red men got down on me—why they did I don't know. Do you?"

"I think I can tell ye why you are *Hounded by Red Men*."

"Why?"

"Because you are a pioneer up here in farming. You are the first man to try to make of this part of Yukon territory something of a farming district, you represent peaceful civilization—Nihillalau represents nothing but the forces of violence. You can't go together. One of you must die."

"Gosh! I am not interfering with any gun men. They can stab and shoot till the cows come home and I don't care."

"You as an individual are harmless, but you are the first of a host of farmers. This great wild country about us in the main is merely mining country. There where the mines are there is not much use for agriculture. Nothing but gold seems to grow in that soil, but out here along the Porcupine River, about the Bell River, up the Old Crow River, there's stretches of good

land to be reclaimed from the forests, leaving still plenty of forest and rocky hills and mountains for the wild animals of the wildwoods."

"Well?"

"Suppose that five hundred farmers settled in this part of the country and then there would come the department of the Merchant-stores, tiny at first, would begin to spring up in little settlements. There would be business here in supplying the five hundred farmers with goods—soon there would be one thousand farmers and ten stores—then civilization would be all over this region and where would there be room for Nihillalau?"

"I see plainly."

"Of course. Nihillalau was educated in an Indian mission down Great Slave Lake way. He is smart; he has learned things. He sees that running you out now may save this vast wilderness to such as he—it's the same old story over again."

"Yes, the gun man, and anarchy first. Death, murder, bandits, drunkenness and theft rampart, and glorying in their shame—then comes the peaceful farmer. Then the gun man fades away."

"Ah."

"The Indian bandit has seen this in his own case. He was driven out of the Great Slave Lake country by the forces that are beginning again up here in you. He don't propose to suffer that fate again. He will try to intimidate any other pioneer farmer by killing you, the first one to get in his path."

"It's hard luck to get in the way of outlaws with whom you don't want to fight, because you——"

Silent Sol did not answer Dick.

Instead he shaded his eyes from the sun and looked over toward the covert that the uncleared forest afforded to any skulker.

Sol grasped his rifle.

"Get ready, boys, here comes the gang," Sol shouted the next minute.

He took quick sight along his rifle.

With the bellow of the piece a cry of agony came from the underbrush into which he had fired.

"The outlaws! Fight for your lives!" cried Silent Sol, as he aimed and fired again at prowling forms that came stealing through the underbrush to attack the little party of three peaceful persons.

CHAPTER V.

A MAIDEN'S PERIL.

The fight was fast and furious.

Shielded by the wagon Dick Loxa and Silent Sol poured shot after shot at the advancing outlaws.

The outlaws in turn sent their death-giving bullets at the devoted men, while Barbara, now a fiend of a fighting girl, with her pretty teeth clenched, stood up in the rear of the wagon and fired her revolver at every shadowy form.

Barbara would have been killed in the first fire had it not been for what was undoubtedly an order given as to her safety.

She was not even made the target for shots, nor was any allowed to come near her.

There seemed to be a direction regarding her that served as a shield.

While the girl was firing away at shadowy forms, she did not see that near her was approaching several of the outlaw gang.

The desperadoes were led by Buckskin Pete, as fierce a member of the outlaw band as it contained, aside from its fierce leaders Nihillalau and Eitelwolf.

Buckskin Pete wore his greasy hair in a wild mass around his seamed, scarred, crime-lined face. His black eyes were sunken in their cavernous sockets.

His faded clothes were of a variegated type; a red-flannel shirt, an old dirty vest, a pair of Buckskin trousers, which thus gave him his name, and a wide belt that bristled with revolvers and knives gave him a fighting appearance, he thought.

In the top of his high boot was stuck the biggest bowie-knife that money could buy.

A harder set of customers than the three that were with him never attacked a peaceful party before in any wild country.

Men of every nation and hue were in Nihillalau's band; red Indians, vagrant Englishmen, Irish thieves, Dutch gun-men, Italian counterfeits, French ticket-of-leave men—all were grist that came to the bandit mill and all, every one, merged his identity in the gang.

Nihillalau had much of the attributes of the born commander.

He had the trick of rewarding for extra service down to the ground.

He knew when to give and when to withhold; when to play this man against the other, and this made his terror to outsiders. As the red terror he flashed about the territory in almost perfect security, because he knew that he was secure in having a solid gang behind him; there were no "kickers" in his bunch.

But Barbara, intent at firing into the underbrush a hundred feet away where violent agitation made her feel sure that the outlaws were secreted in force, paid little attention to the men wiggling like worms through the clearing at her feet.

One that wriggled along directly behind Buckskin Pete was Muscoda, of the Long Knife, a treacherous, sneaking Sioux Indian who had drifted from over the United States Border and joined the outlaw gang.

The third man was Quick-shot Al, another outlaw who came from New England, originally to become one of the most noted gun-fighters on the frontier.

The three men were noted for deeds of desperate daring in the band of Nihillalau, and he himself, the leader of the gang, had sent them out to try and secure Barbara.

"It's not my intention yet to kill Dick Loxa and Silent Sol," Nihillalau had explained to Eitelwolf. "What I am anxious to do is to shoot-up this part in road agent style, and get that girl into my hands a prisoner, and I don't much care whether any one kills her two defenders or not—only I am not out to kill them. If they are killed, all right, but what I want is to keep them pretty well occupied in shooting at me so I can get that girl. I will go after Dick and Sol later. But first I want to get rid of the girl."

"Why?"

"That's my business."

"Going to marry her off to some one in the gang that wants to go East?"

"No. I'm going to kill her."

"How?"

"That will come later."

Even obtuse drunken, dirty, half savage Eitelwolf could not see why all the pains were being taken to catch the girl alive, when a sudden rush could have killed all of the party, girl and all, killed all but the girl, or all but Dick or for that matter Silent Sol, any time.

However, the mind of an Indian is not to be fathomed by any white man, and Eitelwolf just let the question go in his mind. He was not going to try to get to the motives that governed Eitelwolf's master, Nihillalau; it was enough for Eitelwolf to obey.

"Waal," cried Eitelwolf, "it's up to ye. Yar the stuff, ole chap. Ef ye wants ter git the gal that er way, w'y git her. It aint nawthin' ter me wot ye does as long as ye come over wit me share o' thar plunder."

This also seemed to be the position taken by every member of the gang who were in ear shot.

"Well, I want Buckskin Pete, Muscoda, the Long Knife and Quickshot Al to get out after that girl. It's a job of danger for the girl's a good shot and that scout, Silent Sol, and the girl's brother, Dick Loxa, know how to fight like fiends. But I want you three men to get out of cover, wriggle up to the girl and capture her."

The outlaw leader spoke from an intimate knowledge of things when he said it was a desperate and deadly dangerous mission he had sent his three best men upon.

The shooting habits of Silent Sol were well known.

He was one of the best shots in the territory.

Dick Loxa also knew how to use his weapon in hunting wild game and had quite a reputation in meeting and slaying black bear and therefore, he was not to be approached lightly.

"Be keerful," Buckskin Pete urged upon his companions when they started on their dangerous mission.

The party in the bushes redoubled their firing to distract the attention of Silent Sol and Dick.

"Remember that Sol shot one of our men through the heart, when he first fired at us," cautioned Nihillalau as he sent away the Buckskin Pete party. "Use all your woodcraft in this trip."

No matter what the errand may have been Buckskin Pete showed great adroitness in his work.

He and Muscoda, the Long Knife, and Quick Shot Al, first rushed out into the open, and then sank to the ground, burrowing into the earth as deeply as they could, taking advantage of every shrub and bush, until at length, unseen in the quick popping of the blazing weapons they managed to dart to the rear of the prairie schooner and, then Buckskin Pete jumped on the wagon, and grasped Barbara by the arms.

"Hyar ye," the ruffian hissed in the girl's ears. "Gine me thet thar gun!"

His hairy paw wrested Barbara's revolver from her hand.

She opened her mouth to scream.

But the flash of a bowie-knife held close to her throat by Muscoda, the Long Knife, sent the blood back to her heart in a wave of fear, and froze the blood in her veins.

"Gal, shut up!" growled the Indian.

Barbara tried to scream in spite of the ugly knife but her voice refused to obey her.

She felt herself picked up as if she was a feather.

Buckskin Pete carried her in his arms as if she was a baby and in two bounds, it seemed to Barbara, she was wrenched from the wagon, and found herself surrounded by a gang of horrible men, wild, bloodthirsty, who grinned and laughed while one, a daredevil faced Indian approached to speak to her with a sneer of hate on his face.

"Nihillalau, the Red Terror," cried Barbara as her senses left her and she sank fainting at the feet of the outlaw chief.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT FOR LIFE.

Inspector Gerard Taft and Constable Norman York of the Royal North-West Mounted Police force coolly met the issue of battle which the outlaw band had thrust upon them.

They darted behind cover, each one whispering a signal in his horse's ear, at the same time touching each animal on their fore-shoulders.

The intelligent horses lay down quickly in answer to the signal and when the outlaws were ready to charge the two gallant young men, they found each shielded by a heap of logs, brush, and dirt, behind which horses and men lay awaiting the foe.

The duties of the two policemen were not like those of a city policeman, but consisted mostly in possessing a knowledge of woodcraft, and an ability to use it, and thus fight the criminal elements of the forest on their own grounds, twice as dangerous by the way as any possible city danger.

The party that had attacked Taft and York was not the main body of the outlaws.

These under Nihillalau and Eitelwolf, were busy at this moment in the attack upon Dick Loxa and his party of brave people.

The party that attacked the young men was lead by Buffalo Ed, a lower ranked ruffian than the leaders of the outlaw, but a pretty bad citizen at that of proved courage, and who was quite as bloodthirsty as any other member of his gang.

With Buffalo Ed were two Indian warriors, White Feather and The Grizzly Bear, two truculent Indian thugs and they made the forest ring in their desire to kill Taft and York.

The roar of the three rifles of the outlaws and the bark of the pieces of the policemen, made no end of a racket in the woods.

The outlaws had sunk to cover as soon as they saw their enemy intrenched and there was much firing but little results on each side.

Finally the firing ceased on both sides.

The outlaws saw that Taft and York had secured a place where they could resist forever.

It was on the top of a little wooded hill.

The two policemen commanded the entire vicinity owing to their being on high ground, and were so sheltered by the ramparts they had hurriedly put about them, that they could not be fired at with any degree of

aim, while the one firing was in the open, and would make a good mark for the two young men to fire at.

"Well?" interrogatively remarked Norman when the firing had ceased on both sides. "We seem to be cooped up here?"

"Rather," smiled Gerard.

"I am not much pleased with this condition," smiled Norman in return.

"Neither am I."

"What can you do?"

"If you don't like to sit tight you are at liberty to rush out of this leafy glade."

"Guess that's the ticket. But who do you think this gang belongs to?"

"I think they are part of Nihillalau's gang."

"The chaps that burned up the Loxa Ranch?"

"Yep."

"What do you suppose we can do about it now?"

"Sit tight and fight hard."

"I'm willing to fight but I don't like the sitting tight thing—that is a part I don't seem to carry out very well."

"If you don't like to sit tight you are liberty to rush out of this leafy glade."

"If I do I will lay tight, eh?"

"As sure as you are born."

Both men pondered deeply.

It was not pleasing to the pride of either to be so beleaguered that they were forced to lay supine behind a rampart, but feeling as they did that there was no other way out of it, the two men tried to be as patient as they could.

"I wonder—say what's that?" suddenly said Norman. "I hear the sound of fighting over there to our right."

"I don't hear anything," rejoined Gerard.

Both listened intently.

But now each could hear plainly the snapping of revolvers, the louder roar of rifles and the shouts and screams of the men engaged, the trained senses of both Norman and Gerard told them, in a fierce combat.

"There's a battle going on not more than a mile or two away from here," said Norman.

"No question but that you are correct," replied Gerard, "but who is fighting?"

"It must be the main gang of the outlaws who have stuck up Dick Loxa and his party. They must have escaped through the woods some way."

"I guess that is so. We ought to be able to help them. But how? We are pretty well pinned in here, don't you know?"

"Where there's a will there's a way," remarked Gerard. "Let me get my thinking cap on."

The two men sank back, trying to puzzle a way out of their own trouble and some happy medium by which they could go to the rescue of the party who they could still hear firing away as if they never could hurl enough lead at each other.

"Thunder!" cried Gerard. "I wish I had a chance to escape from here."

Norman did not reply.

He was listening intently.

"By thunder the noise of that shooting is certainly coming nearer," Norman said. "By George, Gerard, I tell you I am right—that noise without doubt is coming nearer."

Gerard and Norman again listened intently.

They both were sure that the sound of firing which had at first been distant was coming nearer.

It was evident by this time not only to Gerard and Norman but also to Buffalo Ed, White Feather and the Grizzly Bear.

"See, Norman," pointed out Taft. "You can trace an agitation of the bushes there showing that the outlaws are hearing the approaching battle and like ourselves are wondering what it can mean."

"I am going to take a shot at the highest bush there," rejoined Norman. "It seems to me that I can see a tall thug of an Injun lurking there."

Norman took careful aim through the interlacing logs directly in front of him.

With the sound of his rifle's shot there came a scream from the point at which he had aimed.

There was a threshing of the bushes and then there was stillness again.

Not a bush moved.

"I don't know whether I got that chap for keeps or not," muttered Norman, "but whether I killed him or not I certainly made him screech."

"You stopped the rustling of the bushes at all events," replied Gerard.

By this time the noise of the approaching fight could be heard plainly.

"There are about twenty people engaged in this fight," speculated Gerard. "I suppose that it's Dick Loxa and his party. But how so many volleys are being fired by each side I cannot understand. If Loxa and Barbara are being besieged by the outlaws how can they fire so rapidly?"

It was plain to see what Gerard meant.

The noise of the shooting came as if many weapons were being fired in files.

First there would be a long roll coming without doubt from rifles fired with direction from some commanding force so regular and together came the reports fired from many weapons.

Then there would be a few isolated shots, but being sent from automatic revolvers—and then there would come the long roll of the volley firing.

Shouts of men, wild screams of wounded, neighing of horses and then once more the fatal rise and fall of the battle's ebb and flow would come nearer, nearer, nearer.

It was an inspiring episode.

It sent the good fighting blood of both Gerard and Norman flying up and down in their veins.

Battle-lust shone from their eyes.

"Isn't that great?" cried Gerard, "I'd like to get into that scrap. My! but don't it make one's blood dance!"

"U-m-m!" rejoined Norman, who was fingering his revolvers and looked like a sturdy bull-dog, as he was, ready to get "into the game" if he only could with both courage and ability to give a good account of himself.

The noise of the battle came now so clearly that it was evident that soon there would be seen the opposing forces.

"They are right around that point there," shouted Norman. "Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" howled Gerard now beside himself with excitement. "God save King George!"

"Hurrah!" again cried Norman. "There they come—look, the outlaws are running away."

His rifle whirled up to his shoulder; was aimed and fired in a breath.

The screech of Buffalo Ed and his loping off with his left arm hanging useless with a bullet in it, which had broken it, showed the fine marksmanship of the man who had sent forth the leaden missile.

"I got one," shouted Norman. "See those rascals run!"

"There is no doubt but that you are telling the truth," answered Gerard, "when you see those chaps run—the way they are sprinting shows they are in a devilish hurry."

"There's not a thing to be seen of the outlaws," replied Norman. "The trembling of yonder bushes tells the story of their departure, but that is all we have to solace ourselves for their absence."

"I can see them go without shedding any tears," cried Gerard. "I'm going to get into the scrap over there as quick as I can."

Gerard pulled his horse to its feet, the patient, sagacious animal having laid quietly until receiving the rising command from its master.

Norman did the same with his mount and in a very few moments the two men were galloping through the forest in the direction of the sounds of the battle.

After loping half a mile at good speed, Norman broke the silence.

"I'm darned if I understand this," he cried. "There's no sound—whoa."

He pulled his horse to a halt.

In three more jumps Gerard did the same.

Both men listened.

Not a sound could they hear save for the silence of the woods broken only by the twitter of birds, the distant calls of wild animals, and the hum of insect life.

"Why? What?—say this scares me green," ejaculated Norman. "Where's the sound of the fighters? Where's the noise of that great battle?"

"Nothing seems to be doing now," replied Norman. "Let us lope to that rocky hill and ride up it a bit. It will show us quite a stretch of woods."

"But the outlaws?" objected Norman. "We would be soft marks for their guns standing up there on our horses like a couple of sky-scraping houses."

"N-o-o," replied Gerard in a meditative tone. "There's something queer in all this. The outlaws ran as far as we did in the other direction—we have come a mile—they have run a mile; guess there's no danger from them."

"What scared them?"

"I don't know. Something?"

"It must have been something for they dusted out of their cover like men in a panic. When that leader Buckskin Pete got a bullet in his arm he did not stop to argue with his rifle but just loped ahead intent on escaping, now I remember it all, from something more dangerous than we are."

"Well, we will go up on that rocky hill and spy out the land heading us, at all events."

Gerard led the way.

But Norman was pounding along right behind him immediately.

They rushed to the hill, picked their way horseback up its rocky, sloping sides, for a North-West horse can scramble up hills that an Eastern cat would hesitate

to negotiate, and soon were in a position to command the scene miles around.

"Look there!" cried Gerard as he pointed over toward the distant horizon directly facing him.

Norman gasped.

Before his eyes was spread a wondrous vision.

The wide stretches of the prairie, the forest, the Porcupine River, and the mountains could be seen for immeasurable miles.

It was a scene of awe-inspiring beauty.

But right where the entire scene melted into the calm, clear, brilliant bluish-pink haze of the horizon, there could be seen a great army of men marching, countermarching, with banners waving, and, anon, puffs of white smoke showed where rifles were blazing and men falling as infantry opened fire on entrenched positions.

"Thunders of the ages!" whispered Gerard. "What a battle. Where did that force come from—there must be two or three thousand men engaged!"

"No question of that. But Gerard," whispered Norman in an awe-struck tone. "In spite of seeing as we do that the infantry is firing, why don't we hear again the sound of the explosions of their weapons?"

"Thunder! You are right."

The two men were unable to explain the mystery.

Then there came a white cloud before their eyes.

Its filmy opaque lightness shut out the scene from their eyes.

The cloud passed.

But there was nothing to be seen on the horizon of the fighting men.

"What was it?" cried Norman, with a white face.

"Lord only knows, I don't!" replied Gerard. "To me it was a battle plain enough. We surely heard the sounds of the carnage back there where we were hemmed in by the outlaws. But when we come here—we hear no firing but we see a phantom battle."

"It was a battle of spectres. Shades of the dead soldiers who have perished on many battle-fields fought that fight!" rejoined Norman. "It was a ghostly battle!"

"Perhaps you are right. I can not explain what we have heard and seen," answered Gerard. "Our duty, however, is to take this as a warning and try to go to the rescue of Dick Loxa and Barbara Loxa."

"Forward!" cried Norman.

"Back to the Loxa Ranch," shouted Gerard. "Hurry!"

The men sped away on their errand of aid.

CHAPTER VII.

A GAMBLE FOR LIFE.

When Barbara Loxa came to her senses she was in an entirely new environment.

She saw that she had been carried for a long distance into the heart of the mountains.

"This must be the inner fortress of the pirates," Barbara thought as she looked around her.

To her astonishment she was not bound.

A tent made Indian style with the queer look of an imitation of an inverted tea-cup, which was produced by bending willow saplings to the desired shape and covering the whole frame-work with Buffalo skins with an inner lining of soft deer-skin, faced the unfortunate girl.

The tent was the counterpart of many others.

Barbara counted fifty such tents laid out in a semi-circle, and rudely suggesting streets and avenues by their marked uniformity.

A spring of clear, cool water, ran from a perpendicular rock in the rear of the outlaw encampment.

This rock was a steep lofty crag that towered in the air hundreds of feet, to join there another great rock and to then climb together to the limitless sky, which crowned the ambitious rocks for their valor with a wreath of perpetual snow.

"Safest place in the world," thought Barbara, "at least so far as an attack from the rear is concerned."

There was no question but that she spoke truly for it would have seemed impossible for any one to climb down the rocky place. Nothing but a force in an air-ship could have succeeded and there was, so far as the girl knew, not a single air-ship in the great North-West.

"No hope of rescue from that side," thought Barbara.

Her heart sank, as she thought of her brother Dick and Silent Sol hemmed in by the out-numbering outlaws.

"No one to rescue me if they could get down that awful height there," said the poor girl with tears in her beautiful eyes.

In front of the tent Barbara saw that the outlaws had equally well arranged for a place where there would be no danger of a surprise.

The tents were in a wooded spot, but on a high bluff that overlooked the surrounding country for miles.

"They have cleared away the timber from the brow of the gulf," the fair girl muttered. "I see a sentinel walking to and fro in that cleared spot. A horse-man could be detected for miles from that eerie point—and no foot man could pass out there on his way to this camp without being seen—I am indeed cut off from hope!"

Barbara said these words aloud.

They were overheard by Nihillalau, the outlaw chief, himself, who laughed in a bitter way in his happiness at the mental agony his captive was enduring.

"Girl," the Red Terror said at length, "you are right. You are cut off from hope."

Barbara sprang to her feet.

A cry of dismay passed her lips when she saw the outlaw chief, whose red badge of murder she knew had plunged the fair country about her for miles in all directions almost literally in a sea of blood.

"Fiend in human form, what do you want with me?" cried Barbara, who knew that it would do little good to beg for mercy.

She had the spirit of a true frontier woman in spite of her girlish years and determined that nothing would make her cringe in the presence of the terrible bandit.

"Do not call names," cried Nihillalau, "names do not mean anything."

"Your name does."

"What does it mean?"

"Everything that is vile, mean and treacherous.

You are hated far and wide by every decent person. Your own band fear you, and to keep your supremacy over them you truckle to them, or fight them as you think will serve your ends—"

"Stop! Many a man lies in his grave for saying less to Nihillalau than you have."

"And many a woman wishes that she was dead before she had said less and suffered at your hands more than death," cried the undaunted girl. "You are a man that I'd rather die than have within ten miles of me if I had my own way."

"Not having your own way, you will listen to what Nihillalau has to say," purred the Indian thug in his softest voice.

Barbara shrugged her shoulders and remained silent.

What was the use of attempting to contradict such a self-evident proposition as the words of the outlaw indicated.

A captive, alone, the girl knew she must listen to anything that the outlaw wished to say to her.

"I am going to tell you a few things and why."

The outlaw seated himself as he spoke leaving the girl standing before him.

Barbara sneered but she knew that she must listen.

"Usually," continued Nihillalau, "I don't fool much with female prisoners. I send those that I favor to my tent to become one of my wives, or if the girl doesn't suit, I turn her over to any member of my band needing a wife just then. It's bandit rule. It's bandit ways, for now that you have spoken as you have, it's useless to disguise the fact that my gang is an outlaw one and that in all civilized community there is a price on my head, and on every one in my band."

"I hope the price will be collected some day," vindictively replied the girl.

"That shows a humble spirit and Christian charity," cried Nihillalau, with a gleam of spiteful malice in his eyes. "But now, my girl, will you tell me what is there for the Indian in all this wide country but the outlaw life?"

"I don't know what you mean. What is there for you? Why, man, why don't you try to live a decent life—"

"Stop!" commended Nihillalau. "If I did—what then? Would you willingly wed with an Indian?"

Barbara shook her head.

"Would any white woman?"

Barbara again shook her head.

"If I gave up this outlaw life would any one hire me so that I might live, except to do the dirtiest of menial labor?"

Barbara shook her head faintly this time.

"Where does the Indian come in, in your white man's world? He is not the social equal of the white man, the white man thinks! He is not his business equal! He is nothing; no the red-man is nothing."

The outlaw paused to take breath.

"I learned this at the mission school at Great Slave Lake, that the Indian, be he ever so educated in the eyes of a white man, is no Indian to be a white man's equal but an Indian to be a white man's slave—I do not like slavery so I became an outlaw."

Barbara looked fearlessly into the eyes of the chief.

"But why do you break the law, even if you are all that you say in the white man's eyes?"

"The white man has no right to make the laws for me. I am living on the land that my forefathers lived

on, that was given to him by the right of the discoveries of his forefathers! What right has the white man to steal my land and then make laws for my guidance?"

Barbara saw the outlaw's point of view.

It was that of most Indians if one can get them to talk upon their position in the scheme of things.

Barbara made up her mind quickly and put a cogent question at the outlaw.

"Let us grant what you say to be true, but why are you attacking my brother and I? What have we done? We have not stolen your land. We have made no laws for or against you or your race? Why should we be *Hounded by Red-Men?*"

"It's not you possibly that I think of when I seek my revenge upon the white race, no, it is not you or your brother. But I have burned your home over your head and my brothers are now butchering your brother to make the story of your fates a *sign-post* that will tell all the rest of the world of farmers and civilization that you represent to *keep out of the land of Nihillalau.*"

Barbara saw that she was undoubtedly lost.

This truculent, dissolute, crack-brained savage, blood-thirsty, and all Indian cunning and treachery had a "bug" in his bonnet over his alleged wrongs.

Barbara and her brother were to be the victims of the terrible imbecile ideas of the remorseless savage before her.

"There's no use of arguing with a fool or a fanatic," cried the girl. "If you will leave me I will prepare for the death that I see you are anxious to meet out to me. Well, I suppose I must meet my fate as courageously as I can but it seems hard to have to die, because a crazy brute of a savage wills it."

As the brave girl spoke she looked the savage wild-beast of a man in the eye proudly and fearlessly as the untamed eagle glances at its enemy.

The glance kindled an answering one in Nihillalau's eye.

He loved a brave person, man or woman, and he was brave, although he was a desperate man of blood, and outlawry.

"Your fate had been marked out in my mind, girl," the outlaw said with a grim hateful smile, "but your words are so fearless and brave that I—wait one moment."

For several moments the thug pondered deeply with his brilliant, bold black-eyes fixed upon the ground.

Then a thought came to his mind that seemed to please him, judging by the smile that appeared on his face.

"I will give you a chance for life. One chance!"

Barbara's eyes brightened.

"One chance," she thought. "A chance—that is better than no chance at all!"

She turned her eyes toward the outlaw.

"I will give you this chance—I will throw dice with you for your life," hissed the bandit.

"Gamble with you for my life? Are you mad?" gasped Barbara.

"Not in the slightest. I have some dice here," replied the outlaw with a villainous smile as he extracted five cubes of dice from his pocket. "We will play for your life. If you lose your life is mine, to take, or to not take as I choose. If you win you are free to do with your own life as you wish."

"Do you mean that I may leave this camp free—if I win?"

"I do. Not only that but I guarantee you a safe escort to the nearest frontier hamlet."

"There is no town nearer than Fort Davidson," cried the girl.

"Then to Fort Davidson you shall go—if you win."

"If I lose?" tremblingly questioned Barbara.

"Your life is mine. I may send you back there to wear it out as one of my wives. I may give you to the meanest outlaw in my band as his bride—that is none of your affairs if I win. Then, you are to deliver your life into my hands and I will dispose of it as I see fit."

Barbara was storm-swept.

She was like a hunted animal.

No matter which way she turned she could not escape.

If she did not accept the terrible hazard of the dice, offered her by the bandit, he was able to kill her any way; she was alone, unarmed, a girl, young, pretty, hopeless—there was nothing for her to gain by refusing to gamble for her life and happiness.

If she did not gamble death was her portion any way.

She might win by a lucky cast of the dice!

If she did not she was no worse off than she was at the present moment.

These thoughts rang through her distraught brain.

She raised her eyes to meet the evil ones of the outlaw.

Then Barbara threw back her head proudly.

"I accept," she cried. "I will cast dice with you for my life. I will throw the cubes first. I have more at stake than you have, you villain!"

Barbara rattled the five dice of death or life in the cup which she held in her white hand, and cast the cubes upon a flat-stone, so that both she and the outlaw could plainly see what Dame Fortune had sent her.

"Ha!" roared the outlaw.

CHAPTER VIII.

STALKING OF KING DEATH.

"Hold hard, Gerard," cried Norman.

"Why?" questioned Gerard.

But his hand pulled quickly on the Mexican bit his good horse wore, and the animal stopped in his tracks.

A Mexican bit, modeled after the old Spanish one, either stops a horse immediately or breaks his jaw.

The horse preferred to stop rather than to have its jaw broken.

Meanwhile Norman had stopped his fine steed also.

"What's the matter?" queried Gerard. "We are far from the Loxa Ranch. Why did you stop me?"

"Two men sneaking along there through the underbrush?"

"Where?"

"At your right."

"I don't see anything."

"Oh, you're not looking in the right place. Look further to the right."

"O-h-h! I see something!"

"Yes. It's two men."

"No, it isn't it's wolves—no it's a coyote."

"Wolves, your eye! Coyote yourself—that's two men I tell you!"

Slow to pass an opinion unless he was absolutely sure, Gerard sat gazing at the two hulking shadows.

They stole softly along as if wishing not to be seen.

"I see them distinctly now," quoth Gerard. "It's two men, all right."

"Wonderful! Great brain power you have. Can tell a man from a wolf or a coyote in three looks," snapped Norman.

"Don't get your back up like an inexperienced kitten, always fluffing up and spitting at everything new it sees. I am not going to pronounce a man a man until I'm sure that he isn't a wolf or a coyote."

"Most men are a mixture. Wolves when they think they can get away with it but coyotes when they feel that they can't. If there's anything more sneaking, wicked, cowardly, mean, treacherous, sly, bloodthirsty, when he can pounce on anything defenseless, than a coyote tell me who it is."

"Oh, that's an easy one."

"Speak up."

"I am thinking of Nihillalau."

Norman nodded.

"Say, old chap, that thief of an Indian outlaw has certain sure got it on any coyote for meanness that ever walked this earth."

Gerard made no answer.

He was studying the forms ahead of him lurking in the underbrush.

There was something that looked bloodthirsty and lurking with death in the way the men stole from bush to bush, took advantage of every bit of inequalities of the earth, sneaked behind every rock in such evident purpose to conceal themselves from any watching eye.

"Those are not bandits," Gerard trickled along in words. "Those are white men—by Jove, it's Dick Loxa and Silent Sol."

Gerard had never spoken to either of the hurrying, crouching men, but he had seen them several times at the Hudson's Bay Company fort known as Fort Davidson, and had a fine memory for faces.

"By thunder, your right!" ejaculated Norman. "How do you suppose the men came here?"

While he spoke the policemen saw Silent Sol looking curiously at them.

Dick Loxa stood with his hat pulled over his eyes, crouching down to get a better view.

Gerard stretched his arms high above his head with the palms of the hands toward Dick and Sol, and the fingers wide spread so that it showed that he had no weapon in either hand.

This made a sort of human "Y" of himself, but Gerard knew, and so did every one in the dramatic little scene know, that it was North-West for "a friend" in the prevailing sign language of the country; and by the way it is the sign of friendly intent all over the world where an Indian lives.

It is one of the universal signs by which the white man meets the savage.

Loxa, as soon as he saw the sign, rushed forward followed by Silent Sol.

He had not taken ten running steps before he noted

the uniform of the Royal North-West Mounted Police which each man before him wore, and he knew that the uniform was protection and succor for him and for his associate.

"Hurrah!" yelled Dick. "Here's good luck!"

"Hurrah!" chimed in Silent Sol, who for a wonder found nothing else to say in the rush of thankfulness that had come to his heart when he saw the two men, who represented all there was of law and order in that part of the world.

"How did you come here?" went on Dick.

As ranking officer in the party Gerard took charge of the examination of Dick and Sol, while Norman sat by and listened.

"You're Dick Loxa," began Gerard.

"I am."

"And you are Silent Sol?"

"Yes."

"Dick, how did you get here—I'm Inspector Taft of the Royal North-West Mounted Police. My associate is Constable York of my command," added Gerard.

"I know you," replied Dick. "You are from the post of Mounted Police at Fort Davidson?"

"Yes," replied Gerard.

Silent Sol put in a remark just then. It indicated a remarkable thirst so Gerard asked Norman to reduce it with his canteen, and the two old campaigners drew apart to enjoy a "creature comfort" as Sol called it in leaving Gerard to continue his conversation with Dick Loxa.

"Now," added Gerard, "we are out to ask you some questions. We know something about your hard luck."

Dick nodded.

"It was hard luck," said Dick. "It's all due to Nihillalau's wish to drive me from the territory."

"I know."

"He has been *hounding* me for months."

"Yes?"

"He has been lurking around my ranch for months."

"I can readily understand that he has."

"I have suffered all kinds of petty thievery from him and his gang for months."

"Yes?"

"He has run off my cattle. Killed my stock when he could not get a chance to run it off and about a month ago he left a warning at the ranch."

"A warning? In what shape?"

"The usual. I found it stuck in a tree near my house. It was a note saying that he would visit me and murder me and my sister, and burn our place to the ground if I didn't take the hint and 'pull out for some other place!'"

"Aha!"

"I didn't pay much attention to it, because I thought it was half a bluff. I just went on as usual, attending to my work on the ranch."

"Then what happened?"

"Every horse I had on the place, some twelve in number, and about twenty-five cows, were all run off one night. When I got up in the morning I had only four work mules left and how they escaped being taken I can not understand."

"What did you do?"

"There was nothing for me to do. I just was hot clean down to my toes. I got my rifle and started out to see what I could do, but Lord, what could I do?"

"Did you do anything?"

"Yes. As I went by a spring where I get water, I saw an Indian, aiming his gun at me."

"One of the outlaws?"

"Yes. An Indian outlaw."

"Well?"

"I got my gun going just about six seconds before he got his working although he was aiming, when I saw him fust."

"I saw that you did."

Dick started blankly.

"How did you see?" he cried.

"I didn't see you shoot. Nor did I see him fall, but I saw the Injun lying by the spring with a bullet in his head."

"Oh."

Dick smiled.

"Yes," added Gerard. "Norman and I—Norman is Constable York—were on the Fort Davidson trail together, when the thugs set fire to your ranch. We saw the smoke, speculated about it for a bit and then we rushed on to rescue you, when we got it through our noddles that it was your ranch that was on fire. We didn't find a sign of life, when we prowled about and when we found the dead Injun we saw in a moment that it was all due to Nihillalau's gang. We had been after that bandit from about ten days past, but we had not come up with his trail until he set it for us by setting fire to your property."

"The cur! I knew after I'd shot the Injun that it was now a case of skip or get killed. I had my sister and I didn't want her to be murdered or suffer a fate worse than death at the hands of the bandit leader or one of his hand, so I packed up what I could lay hands on quick in a prairie schooner, hitched my four mules to it, and was just starting off, when Sol there, came rushing to me with the information that Nihillalau was already on my trail. Silent Sol had seen the Indians marching to attack and murder me, and as Sol is a splendid woodsman, we started under his guiding to make a wide detour from the Fort Davidson trail down which the outlaws were coming, over the upper bend of the Porcupine River and then we were going to hit the trail again and get to Fort Davidson. There's no succor between my ranch and the fort, you know."

Gerard nodded.

"Then," added Dick, "we were stuck up by the outlaws in the thickest part of the forest through which we were driving—"

"You fought them?"

"We did. All hands. Like tooth and nail. We drove them off, it would seem, because they suddenly departed after a smart battle—but—"

Dick's face was contorted with grief.

"My sister was captured by the devils!"

His reply caused Gerard to start violently.

"Gracious Heavens!" cried Gerard, "how did that happen?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"Strange as it seems I do not."

"Why don't you know?"

"In the hot fight that began with the outlaws they lay hidden in the bushes around us, rather more in front of us than behind us, but in a sort of semi-circle."

"Regular Injun-bandit style of fighting when they cannot surround one, they adopt that plan."

"I know. Well, we crouched behind the wagon to get some kind of protection for we were few and they were many."

"I see it all."

"My sister Barbara, Bab, as we call her for a pet name, was in the wagon where I told her to crouch down and fire out of the box, and that's all I can tell you. We fought for some time. Then there was a sudden cessation of shooting and after our mules had been killed, the outlaws suddenly left, why, or for where, I do not know. Woof! They were gone!"

"Oh."

Gerard's face was dark with his thoughts.

He knew that the outlaws had not rushed away without a reason for they must have seen that it was only a question of time when they could have murdered Dick Loxa and Silent Sol.

If they rushed away it was because they had secured some prize that to them was better than the vengeance of killing the two men.

It was obvious to Gerard that the outlaws had sneaked in to the wagon under cover of the fire of their companions and had made Barbara a prisoner.

That they then relied on killing Dick and Sol later, the gang had withdrawn to their stronghold.

There the fate of Barbara was too appalling for Dick to be told, or for Gerard to fancy.

Gerard, however, knew the "Injun" nature of Nihillalau so well that he felt sure that he would try to torture Barbara mentally before carrying out any purpose he might have as to her, and therefore Gerard felt that if he could only find the secret place where the outlaws hid, and could make a desperate dash for her life, there might be some hopes of a rescue of the unfortunate girl.

When Gerard imparted his view of matters to Dick, the latter was not without hope.

"If we only knew the secret den of the outlaws," Dick cried, "we might after all rescue Bab."

Silent Sol who had heard these words jumped into the breach with a splendid celerity.

"Is that all you want to know?" cried Sol. "Why, boys, I could lead you all to the outlaws' den with my eyes shut."

"Hurrah!" shouted Norman when he heard the words of Sol. "That's the stuff! Let's get a whirl at those chaps. If I'm not good for at least three Injun desperadoes I'll be no longer a subject of George of England!"

"Outlaw bullets dig as deep into fool Englishmen as they do into any one," dryly remarked Gerard.

"I may be a fo-ol," replied Norman in a hurt tone, "but, Gerard, I'm not an Englishman. I'm an Irishman!"

"Worse and more of it," replied Gerard. "You'll get it in your fool head any way. There never was a scrap in sight that an Irishman knew enough to keep out of. They'll fight, if they have to fight among each other."

Dick in spite of his heart-sickness over the loss of his sister could not help smiling.

As for Silent Sol who was feeling his tongue grow rusty because he had not had a chance to chip in only a few words in a long while, began a long story about some friend of his who reminded him of the point of

Gerard's story and then Sol meandered off into flowers of speech, into by-paths of language that beat any alarm clock invented, in the first half of the first inning.

"Here! Here!" cried Gerard. "You Silent man there! Shut up! You'll talk the halter off this horse of mine if you don't quit."

Norman took sterner measures.

He pulled his rifle over until he had a fine bead on Sol's head.

"Shut up!" he shouted.

Sol shut up.

"You fellows lost a darned good story by your monkey doodles," he cried and then relapsed into silence.

As for Dick he laughed in spite of his grief to see how easily his scout friend and companion was squelched.

"Now stop this bye-play," angrily said Gerard. "It's up to Silent Sol here now."

"What's up to me?"

"To lead us to the bandit haunts."

"Oh."

"That's what," cried Dick.

"It's easy," replied Sol. "See that bluff over there about three miles?"

"Sure," cried Gerard.

"See behind that bluff the peak of that great mountain?" added Sol.

"You mean the chap with his head in the clouds?" asked Norman.

"Yes," replied Sol.

"We all see it," impatiently replied Gerard. "What of it?"

"Nawthing! Only at the foot of that inaccessible peak lies the outlaw camp," replied Sol.

There was consternation on the faces of the three other men.

"You mean that the outlaw camp is backed up against that tremendous mountain?" snapped Gerard.

"I mean that the outlaw camp is directly at the foot of that mountain," replied Sol. "Nothing but a bird, I think could get down that cliff. The bandits are safe from a pursuit or attack in their rear."

Gerard studied the distant mountain with a peculiar look on his face.

It seemed to laugh at him, the great patches of eternal snow on its face seeming to make ghastly mouths that grinned in mockery at him.

The mountain seemed to say, "I hold the outlaws secret safe. I am an outlaw in the world of land for I am sterile, rocky, grim, inscrutable and I am an alien myself from all earth that grows things!"

As if in challenge Gerard shook his fist at the mountain.

"Look at Dopey Gerard here," grinned Norman, who did not know what was passing through Gerard's mind. "He is shaking his fist at the mountain in impotent rage."

"I don't know about that," said Gerard with a hoarse laugh. "I've fought most everything in the world—save a mountain—now I—don't—know."

Gerard hesitated.

At length he gave an order.

"The best thing to do now is for Sol to mount behind Norman, and Dick will mount behind me here, and we will proceed," Gerard ordered.

"Whither away?" asked Norman to show his jaunty way of meeting situations.

His superior officer threw him into a speechless state by his reply.

"I am going to stalk King Death," replied Gerard. "I am going to visit the camp of Nihillalau and his bandit gang."

The party started without further words upon its journey.

CHAPTER IX.

HER LAST CAST FOR HER LIFE.

"Two pair, threes up!"

Nihillalau roared the result of the first cast of Barbara Loxa, who was shaking dice for her life with the thug leader of an outlaw gang in the middle of what was supposed by the bandits to be an inaccessible forest retreat of their band.

Barbara covered her eyes with her hands.

She had often whiled away the wild winter nights shaking "poker-dice" with her brother for the fun of the game and now when she heard the outlaw roar the best that she could do, she shuddered; she well knew that it was almost the smallest possible combination she could have thrown from the box in which a few moments before she had so hopefully rattled the ivory cubes.

It was now the outlaw's turn.

He grinned like a human ogre as he shook the box until the dice rattled in it like a castnet.

He flung down the cubes.

Barbara's eyes turned fearfully toward the fatal dice. They brightened.

"Two pair, threes up!" she cried happily.

There lay the cubes.

A pair of threes, a pair of deuces and an ace, lay before the astonished eyes of the outlaw.

It was just exactly what Barbara had thrown.

"A tie," whispered the girl, now encouraged and hopeful.

"It's best two out of three you know," hissed the outlaw.

"Very good! Give me the cubes. It is my turn now. We were tied in the first throw."

Barbara rattled the cubes again.

Once more she poured them out upon the flat stone before her.

"Three aces and a six and a four," she cried.

"Follow up your hand," cried the outlaw in return.

Again Barbara cast.

She "filled" by getting another ace.

Once more the girl, her breath coming fast, threw the fatal dice.

A six rolled up to view this time.

"Three aces and a pair of sixes," cried the outlaw.

"An ace full on sixes," whispered the girl, "ought to be good."

Nihillalau snarled.

"Here you out there somewhere. Bring me a torch.

It's getting dark. I can't see," the bandit yelled.

A bearded thug brought a torch and stuck it in the ground alongside of the ill assorted pair.

His glance was curious.

Pure amazement stood in his face when he saw the chief of his band calmly shaking poker-dice with a beautiful, if pale and care-worn girl.

But Nihillalau paid no attention to the man.

He made his cast with a roar of impatience.

"This is where I win," he howled.

But he only cast a pair of Kings, a five and a three and two.

Barbara's eyes were happy.

Possibly she would win.

At the next cast the outlaw "filled" his Kings.

This made it possible to beat Barbara at the last cast of the hand by throwing another King.

Nihillalau shook the cubes carefully this time.

He gently let them pass out of the box.

Not a King displayed its face.

Barbara had won the first "horse," as it is termed in the deadly battle.

She was one leg ahead of the outlaw.

But to her consternation her luck seemed to have been used up in the first casting. She was easily beaten by the bandit in the next series of three "throws" each.

"Gamesters now," cried the bandit with an evil look. "This is your last chance!"

Barbara nodded.

For her life she could not speak. Her heart seemed to be jumping up in her throat as if it would suffocate her.

She made her casts.

All three only gave her four Kings and a Queen.

The outlaw began.

Barbara's face was white with fear and dread.

She watched the glistening cubes as they fell, as a rabbit watches the charms of the snake.

The outlaw's face was full of malice.

One by one he slowly poured out the cubes.

Five aces at length stared Barbara in the face.

The outlaw had won!

Barbara's life was a forfeit to the implacable thug.

Nihillalau gave a queer, long, double-noted whistle.

Another bandit quickly rushed forward to him.

Soon others came.

Fascinated, the girl saw that there were now twelve men facing her with wide grins of pleasure at the victory of their chief.

Barbara half-fainting heard the creaking of a wagon.

Soon one came up.

It was surrounded by the bandits who quickly unloaded it.

Barbara saw that it had contained stones.

They made a huge pile.

Near the stones Barbara saw a pile of mortar.

Then she heard the clink, clink, clink, of trowels.

Men came now with torches.

The girl heard the low voices of the working bandits as they talked together.

Soon from the pile of stones a wall had been constructed.

The wall was higher than the girl's head.

It was strongly built.

It was made of stones and rocks that sometimes took three of the outlaw's strongest men to move.

The wall progressed upward with great rapidity.

Soon it was about twelve feet high.

Barbara saw that it was about ten feet square.

She could hear the scraping of trowels around the sides of the stones.

The outlaws were covering the sides of the strange building with mortar.

Others were doing the same upon the stony, heavy roof.

"What is that?" Barbara faintly cried.

"What is what?" roared Nihillalau, whose devilish Indian capacity for torture had suggested this dreadful plan.

"This house of stone—why are you building it?" cried the affrighted girl.

"It's your tomb," the outlaw shrieked. "Your life is mine. I have won it. I am going to take it by immuring you alive in that tomb. It is your mausoleum."

"You are going to confine me in that tomb you have built?" wailed Barbara.

"Yes."

"My God!"

"Yes, that is your tomb. I am going to bury you alive in it. You will slowly starve to death within that breathless narrow spot marked by those walls."

"My God!"

"Yes, pray. I will make your death so horrible that no other farmer-girl will ever dare to set foot into my territory with their damnable crop-planting scheme. This country belongs to me, the outlaw! You will die in that place of starvation and I have left one tiny place where I can look in often and gloat over your torture."

The outlaw turned toward the other bandits.

"Come boys," he cried, "hurl this girl into yonder tomb. Let her begin her *living death!*"

All hope died in Barbara's breast.

The girl felt that her death by dreadful torture was about to be encompassed.

She felt herself being left to die of starvation and thirst.

A wail of fear crept from her white lips.

The bandits were approaching.

In the darkness she could see their faces were lit up by faint rays from the torches by which they had been given light so that they could build her tomb; her living tomb.

She tried to cry out.

Then the girl felt a pair of strong arms encircle her waist.

She was lifted bodily from where she crouched into the air.

She saw beneath her rapidly receding, as if the bandits had suddenly sunk to a bottomless gulf, the outlaws, her tomb, the scene itself, and then she felt herself soaring in the air. The darkness about her was intense.

Yet she knew that she was being held in the arms of a strong man.

She heard his words as if in a dream.

"Don't struggle," the man's voice whispered in her ear, "I am a friend. Don't try to get away from me. I will save your life."

Then the entire world about her blew up.

The fair girl lay insensible to all that was going on of danger and of brave deeds.

CHAPTER X.

A HERO'S DEED.

It was dusk when the party consisting of Gerard Taft, Norman York, Dick Loxa and Silent Sol, paused beneath the terrific heights of the great mountain that hid the haunts of the outlaw band led by truculent Nihillalau.

"What next?" queried Norman of Gerard.

"Wait until it gets darker."

"For what?"

"To scale this mountain."

"To do what?"

"Scale the mountain."

"Man, you're crazy!"

"No, I'm not."

Norman laughed in derision.

"Man," he said, "you can't climb those peaks there at this time of night—in fact I don't think you could climb them in the day time."

The other men crowded around Gerard and tried to dissuade him from what they said was certain death.

"Now you fellows wake up," Gerard cried. "I'm not going to argue with you all but if we are going to save Barbara Loxa, your sister, Dick, this is the only way we can do it."

"Dick," put in Silent Sol, silent this time for a wonder, "I believe he can find a way to do it. I know the only way to get down into the outlaw camp is to try this trip up this peak. This is the only unguarded spot about the outlaws I know."

"That's the idea, boys," cried Gerard. "Don't you see there's no other plan? We must scale this peak and all of you must let me down into the bandit camp."

"Let you down," gasped Sol. "Man do you know what you are talking about?"

"I do," replied Gerard.

"It's three hundred feet in a sheer descent of nothing but rock with walls like moulten glass from the top of the peak to where the outlaws are camped," explained Sol with a patronizing air.

"I don't care if it's three thousand feet," snapped Gerard, in reply.

"But where are you going to get your rope?" asked Dick Loxa.

"There's five hundred feet of twisted-hair lariat right there on the pommels of our saddles," cried Gerard as he pointed to the two horses belonging to himself and Norman. "There's more than enough rope right there. If that twisted-hair doesn't hold up one-hundred and eighty-five pounds, I'll fall into the middle of the outlaws."

"If they see you coming they'll fall into your middle with about forty-eleven knives," joked Sol.

"What do I care how many knives they stick into me after they have stuck one? I won't know anything about any knife except the first one," rejoined Gerard.

"The last time I saw Nihillalau he was whetting the finest knife I ever saw," remarked Silent Sol to the general landscape. "It seemed to me that the knife would about fit you, Gerard."

Gerard turned around to the men.

"Now, look here, fellows," he said, "are you men or are you mice?"

"I can answer that quick," returned Norman. "When it comes to trying to climb up a mountain inaccessible except for a balloon, I'm a mouse, and a tiny cowering beastie of a field mouse at that."

All laughed merrily.

"Joke on, boys," replied Gerard calmly, "but you're going to scale the mountain just the same."

"In this dark night?" asked practical Dick.

"No. There will be a moon soon. Don't you see it sticking its round merry old face up over those trees?" replied Gerard.

"I can see myself enjoying that moon," replied Norman, "under other circumstances. The moon never ought to rise save when one has a girl to talk to. Look here, Gerard, come over here and I'll make love to you. You don't know what a game of talk I can put up when the moon is full."

"Or you are," chimed Dick.

"Well, two fulls in one game are allowable, aren't they?"

"If you mean that two full hands are allowable in a game of poker," said Silent Sol, "I must say that having played the game somewhat in my younger days that there's no rule in poker that stops two people that are playing or even three or mayhap four people from each holding full hands. Except it isn't wise to hold three Queens, let us say, and find some other gentlemen in the game also holding three Queens."

Silent Sol stopped for breath.

"Around Fort Davidson they call those hands 'the inquest hands'," added Gerard.

"An inquest hand?" inquired Silent Sol. "I never heard of that kind of a hand."

"Why do they call it 'the inquest hand'?" asked Dick.

"Because as soon as you show it down, there's a Coroner's inquest begun. Some one will put the card over that always wins up here at poker!"

"What card is that?" asked Silent Sol.

"Taint a card—it's a gun."

"Oh," sighed all the other men.

"Well, there's the moon anyway," added Gerard. "We might as well begin our climb."

After they had all engaged in joking and laughing there was deadly purpose shown on every side.

Not one man in the party had in the slightest degree really ever intended not to try the dangerous experiment of climbing the rocky height.

They knew as well as men could that the only possible way to enter the outlaw camp was to let one of their number down the three hundred feet of descent that led from the top of the precipice to the camp, and they were determined to do it or perish in the attempt.

It was a dangerous mission.

They hardly expected to get to the top of the mountain peak itself, without passing through terrible struggles.

But when they began the ascent under the rays of the full moon they found that the danger like many other dangers when boldly faced did not prove to be as dangerous as they had supposed.

"Guess this is pudding and maple syrup, after all," cried Norman as the party after a stiff bit of climbing found themselves hurrying along a rocky ridge, "this seems to be the 'hogs back' of this mountain and the going isn't so very bad at that."

As he spoke his feet tried to kick the moon out of the horizon.

Norman came down on the back of his neck.

He struck a comparatively smooth place in the side of the terrible hill and was scooting toward the brink of a sheer descent that fell abruptly down a thousand feet.

Gerard was too far ahead to benefit his friend by a quick stop of his rolling body.

Dick, right behind Gerard, was helpless.

"He is shooting right over the brink of the canyon—he will be dashed to pieces in the dreadful depths below," gasped Gerard.

But just as Norman was hurtling over the brink of the chasm, Silent Sol grasped him by his collar and literally yanked him backward to safety.

"Au! Ugh! Wow!" gurgled Norman, half strangled by the fierce grasp that Sol had taken upon his collar. "What in thunder—aw, say, my neck's broken."

"You're lucky if it is. Then only your neck would have been broken after all," said Sol. "If you'd slid about an inch further you wouldn't be with only a broken neck. You would have been all ready for a coyote's breakfast. As it is I hope your fool neck is broken. A man who will go blundering along the side of a precipice and stub his toe and try to tumble a few thousand feet more or less is a chump."

Norman, who sat wiggling his head like some human polly-wog, sat up and laughed.

"Mon, ye are the fine talker," he cried. "Ef I hed year gift fer gab, I'd turn to the East and get a job as a barker in a side-show at a moving picture theater. Mon, ye have the foine gift uv gab!"

"If you had your deserts I'd let you take the tumble—not that I think it would hurt ye after all," cried Sol. "You're too light-headed to fall. I think you'd have floated and not fallen, at that."

"Thank you," cried Norman, "but will some one please rub my neck. I know I've sprung a hinge in it."

After a time however, Norman regained somewhat the use of his hinges, as he expressed it, and he and the remainder of the party clambered on upward as if nothing had happened.

"Here we are! Here's the top of the peak," shouted Gerard finally as he flung himself tired and weary down upon the short grass, that was peeping up under banks of light snow.

"It's pretty cold up here," remarked Dick.

"What do you expect?" growled Norman, "we are far up above the snow line. I have often seen grass trying to grow in these heights in mid-summer with a snow bank right near it."

"You can see it now," rejoined Gerard, "but I'm not in love with this cold storage situation. I am not dressed for winter's wintry blasts in the middle of July."

"If it's too cold up here, if you will deign to cast your imperial eyes over yon declivity," replied Norman, "you can see far, far below you the twinkling lights of the outlaw tent. Your dear friend Nihillalau and an Entertainment committee of fifty outlaws are there ready to make it warm for you, and you need not go to the best hotel in the place, register your name and telephone for newspaper reporters to come and interview you at that."

"Well, I'm going down there you bet!" rejoined Gerard.

"Expect to come back?"

"You bet—I'm no Jeffries. I can come back," replied Gerard.

"That's what Jeff said—until he got in the ring," remarked Sol. "I had some Canadian coin down on Jeff. Please, oh, please close that harrowing tale!"

While the men thus talked they worked steadily,

Like most of the male white race they joked the greatest when they felt the keenest.

Not a man there at any moment had really thought of turning away from the perilous mission they had essayed.

Not a man but ever held in his thoughts the dangers to which Barbara Loxa was exposed—but they masked their real feelings under merry talk and even while they prepared for a thrilling attempt at a rescue of the girl, laughed and joked and played pranks like a lot of school-boys.

Finally Gerard and Norman had unwound from their shoulders the long horse-hair lariat.

Their deft fingers had spliced it together.

It now made a rope more than five hundred feet in length.

"It seems to me that the outlaws are not more than three or four hundred feet below us," said Gerard as he measured the distance by looking down into the giddy depths.

"Three hundred feet doesn't sound much when you say it quick," replied Norman, "but it's quite a distance, when you look down the side of a steeple, or a house, where all is in straight lines, so methodical as to not stop your blood from circulating, as when you look three hundred feet down into a deep gorge, or canyon, while the steep sides of the mountain leading to the depths send out fingers of jagged rock to saw at you—wow!"

"Y-e-s," drawled Gerald. "It does make a chap dizzy to look down there at the outlaw camp. They are right smart far down. I can just see the big bonfire they are probably sitting around twinkle like a tiny star—well, in this darkness, shot only by the moonbeams, I won't be able to fully realize where I am at, when I'm whirling in space."

"If you fall you won't realize much of anything," put in Silent Sol.

Dick Loxa was standing near cogitating with himself.

"It seems to me that I will go down if you please," he said, "it's my sister whose life is at stake, I don't like to feel that I am not figuring in the rescue of her if we can rescue her."

"Nonsense," said Gerard. "We appreciate your position. You are doing all that any brother can to help but in this case I am the proper one to descend the dizzy depths. I have been used to climbing the heights and depths of this country for years—no danger, I assure you."

"It's nice for you to make light of it," cried Dick, "but I know the dangers you are facing but I still think that it is my place to try and negotiate the depths."

It took a great deal of argument on the part of the entire party to dissuade Dick, but after awhile he consented that Gerard should make the attempt.

By this time Gerard had made a noose in one end of the lariat. It was much the kind of a swing that

painters make when they are at work on high buildings. Into this noose the intrepid fellow fastened a wide strip of wood which he roughly fashioned with his bowie knife into a sort of seat.

Then he fastened the other end of the lariat to a big tree, and called the entire party over to the tree for a last consultation.

"This tree will act as an anchor," he explained to his companions. "If in any way the rope gets away from you as you pay it out slowly under my weight, the tree will stop your losing the end of the lariat, and it might break my fall at the other end of the twisted horse-hair lariat. Now the only thing to do is to lower me easily and steadily. Don't let the rope fray and cut where it goes over the cliff side. A lariat will almost hold a locomotive but it isn't so strong that it can't be cut."

Silent Sol nodded.

"I remember there was a friend of mine," he said—Dick bruskiy cut him short.

"No memories, no matter how fond, go now, Sol," he said. "Shut up!"

Silent Sol "shut" quick.

"Now," added Gerard, "here is a ball of pack-twine. I use it to pack on our provisions when we are on the move. It's strong. It is the best kind of stuff to tie twenty-five pounds of flour to your saddle with. My plan is to tie one end of this ball to Norman."

"Good plan," said Norman. "Now what will your signal be to stop lowering you?"

Gerard tied the twine about Norman's arm.

He gave one long steady pull.

"That means 'lower,'" he said.

Then he gave three short quick jerks of the rope.

"That means hoist like—well you know."

"I know," laconically said Norman.

"That's all the signals. More might confuse you."

The men went over the signals several times so that there was no possible chance for Norman or for Gerard himself, to become confused.

"Now lower away, boys," cried Gerard as he edged over the cliff. "Lower steadily. This rope will hold twenty men like me if you don't let the side of the cliff cut it."

In a moment more Gerard was spinning down slowly into the terrible depths below.

Now the first sensation was one of extreme giddiness, Gerard felt. The rope twisted him about in the most unpleasant way. He turned sick for a second but as the men above paid out steadily the rope stopped its gyrations, and Gerard felt better.

He had provided himself with a stout stick about ten feet long and with this he kept himself pretty well out from the craig-like upper part of the precipitous sides of granite which made up the beetling brow of the cliff, and as he progressed downward further he saw that the shelving side of the declivity was receding from him, leaving him to swing freer from the point where the rope was held by his friends.

In the first hundred feet Gerard had acclimated himself to his surroundings as brave men have a way of doing and soon he was within a hundred feet of the outlaw camp, swinging over it like a great spider.

So secure were the outlaws in thinking that no human hand could devise any way of descending the cliff that there was no one watching the gloomy sides of the mountain.

If they had in the almost blackness of the night, they would not have seen Gerard for in all the vastness of the forest behind him and the great cliff down which he was spinning, he was an atom in a universe of stupendous things about him.

A cry below him made Gerard clutch his rope in dread.

It was the cry of a woman.

He looked down just as Nihillalau had ordered Barbara Loxa to be placed in her tomb *alive!*

Gerard heard the frightened cry of the girl.

His blood boiled.

He gave a long pull on his signal twine.

He was lowered steadily and as luck would have it came down directly over the spot where the frightened Barbara sat.

Gerard leaned down in the darkness.

One stalwart arm swept the girl in the air.

He raised her to where he could put both arms around her.

He literally glued her to the rope, and his twitching fingers sent the signal to hoist, by the quick jerks of the signal twine flashing up to the laboring men, who knew something had happened by the additional weight they felt upon the rope.

"Gol ding it!" cried Norman as he strained every muscle. "Gerard has hitched a whale on, I guess. But hoist like—everything—he is frantically twitching the rope. It means 'hoist!'"

Every man worked like a beaver.

Never was rope pulled in more steadily or quicker.

"Hold on, here they come!" cried Norman when he saw that Gerard was almost at the top of the cliff.

"Who's they?" snapped Dick.

But Silent Sol and Norman now had two forms by the shoulder which they were assisting over the dizzy cliff out of the awful depths.

Dick gave a cry of pleasure.

"It's Barbara!" he roared.

The happy girl, crying and laughing with pleasure fell into her brother's arms.

"Saved!" capered Silent Sol.

"Saved!" echoed Norman waving his broad-brimmed sombrero.

"I don't know about that yet," said practical Gerard. "Barbara has escaped the outlaws this time, but here we are, three men, one woman, two horses and provisions enough for hardly two, on the top of a terrible peak in the far North-West, miles from succor—I don't know how much or little we have reason to shout 'saved.'"

From the depths below came the sound of shots.

Yells of rage drifted up to the beleaguered party.

"The outlaws are fifty and we are few—well, we aren't 'saved' yet," suggested Gerard. "We have a fight ahead of us yet, for our lives!"

All knew that their gallant commander spoke the truth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RAGE OF THE OUTLAWS.

"Where's the girl?"

The howls of Nihillalau when he found his prey snatched from him in such a mysterious fashion all were

keyed on the opening sentence above set down.

"We don't know. She's vanished!"

This was all the answer the arch-outlaw could get for all his raging and his oaths.

Barbara had disappeared.

That was a verity.

Everything else was a mystery.

At first the thugs thought the girl had rushed back into the veil of darkness outside of the camp.

By the time torches had been secured and searching parties were rushing hither and thither, Barbara was on the cliff top surrounded by friends who were planning for a campaign to get her away in safety.

But the outlaws thoroughly threshed the bushes, right and left.

They could find nothing of Barbara, of course, and when Eitelwolf led one party back to the camp, it was to find an almost insane man, raving at the fire in the person of Nihillalau.

"To lose my revenge," the outlaw leader cried, "when it was within my grasp! Not to see that girl pine, and starve, and die of thirst and starvation, so that I could point to her death as an object lesson as to what would happen to any other farmer-woman coming here, is a bitter pill for me to swallow. Did you find no trace of her?"

Eitelwolf to whom the question was directed cleared his throat and made his speech.

"Now we ain't seen nuttin' o' the gal," he cried, "an' thar's a lot o' the boays that are pretty well dee-gusted et the way yar carryin' on about her. They figger thet thar ain't no woman on yearth wuth the howlin' yar doin' an' that you too much Injun fer them. They ain' holdin' thet thar's much inter this tortur'n uv white gals as ye propose. It's too darned much Injun ways ter be stummicked by a white man."

It was the first time that a symptom of difference of opinion had come to the will of the leader and it cut sharply home to Nihillalau.

"Injun ways?" he shrieked. "Injun ways? You poor fools! Unless you make this girl your objective point and by her death in the way I've prescribed point a terrible moral to any attempt to settle this part of the world," said Nihillalau, "you are going to be *run out of this country* just as I and some others in our band were run out of Great Slave Lake region."

"Wot uv it?" snarled Eitelwolf. "Thar's a lot more ter the No'th-West than Yukon territory. We kin jump frum hyar any time. Thar's jest as good pickin's fer us some whars else."

"No! No!" shrieked Nihillalau. "No one can drive me out again! I'll make this my last stand."

Eitelwolf looked at his chief.

The foaming mouth, frenzied eyes, terrible rage in Nihillalau's face showed that he never would retreat from the position he had taken.

Eitelwolf for all his ignorance was pretty shrewd.

He looked long at the frantic Indian outlaw and then without further words shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

Buckskin Pete, in high favor with the whites in the gang, strolled over where Eitelwolf had seated himself on a log.

He wanted to talk over some things with the white thug.

"What's the matter with the chief?" asked Buckskin Pete.

"Plumb locoed!"

"Huh?"

"Shore. Crazy ez a elk in the spring. Say, thet feller's dang'ous."

"What makes you think thet?"

"W'y he sez, sez he, thet he aint er going ter give up his plan ter ree-capt're thet gal an' torture her by a buryin' her in thet thar livin' tomb."

"Ah?"

"Thet's right! He says a lot o' stuff er'bout a keepin' out them farmers fer fear they'll run us eout er the territory?"

"Wall?"

"Beau, ye knows thet we gun-men aint ergoin' ter holt any part uv the world long?"

"Course not!"

"I've bin run eout uv a lot er places an' it's onny a question uv toime wen we'll git run eout o' hyar. We aint the kinder folk thet peace'ble people are a'goin' ter hev about, eh?"

"Thet's right."

"My plan is ter git ter a community clean up all I kin quick, en then wen there's a neck-tie party bein' arranged fer me ter take th' hint an' ter skip about three jumps erhead uv the party."

"Haw! Haw! Thet's thar game. Skip fer us fore we gits lynched."

"Yep."

"This thar Injun he wants ter make 'last stands' en all that sort uv thing, eh?"

"Yep."

"Waal, I aint much in on this hyar pot any longer, I'll jest let them Injun gang in this hyar ban' git ter any plan thet Nihillalau plots eout. I'm goin' ter saddle up me broncho and pull me boots outen hyar. Thar's some munny er comin' frum the gang but I ain agoin' ter wait fer it. I aint got no call ter fight civilization, boy. My game is ter get me and me gun on th' frontiers. The furterest I gits frum civilization the better I'll feel—see?"

"Hyar goes another chap," cried Buckskin Pete.

This decision marked the decimation of Nihillalau's gang.

In two hours every white man in it had "pulled out."

There was not a single white man left.

The Nihillalau band now was composed of Indians and half-breeds, either half white or half black.

No full blooded white thug, bad as the thugs of white blood were, would "stand" for two things—Nihillalau's torturing plans of a defenseless white girl, or his senseless plan to fight the advance of the white farmer, by the puerile methods he put up.

"Mought ez well try ter stop the Porcupine River frum flowin' ter the Ar-teec Ocean by damming it up wit a tooth-pick," said Eitelwolf, the newly elected leader of the band that "pulled out." "ez ter tink ye kin keep peacemen outen this hyar territory ef they chooses ter cum an' go ter ranchin."

"Ez fer me," cried Buckskin Pete, "a ranchman usually hez munny. 'Twould now be a lot of good ter me ef them prairies an' them valleys erbout us 'ld fill up wit mounting home-builders. A good home-buildin' farmer ez wuth some cash fer me to get to—see?"

This feeling was endorsed by every white man riding near.

"Thar's one thing ter state right hyar," remarked

Buffalo Ed. "I was a leadin' uv them fellers wot hed that thar couple uv mounted cops a shet' up behin' a baric 'de place."

"Yaas, he knows thet," replied Buckskin Pete.

"Wall," continued Buffalo Er, "thar was a heap sight uv shootin' like made by a big lot uv fellers wile we was a shootin' up them cops. I looks out uv me peepers an' say fellers, I seen w-a-y off in thet thar sky a lot uv s-o-l-d-i-e-r-s a fitin' an' a fitin'."

"What," roared Quick Shot Al.

"Say that over again," cried Muscoda of the Long Knife, who although a half Indian, and half white man had elected to cast his lot with his white brothers.

Buffalo Ed repeated his words.

"An' thar's summin more," Ed cried. "Thar was a terri'ble rumblin' an a roarin, an a shootin' uv hundreds and hundreds uv men. Say, thet was fierce sez I."

"Looks like a warnin' fur us ter git. I guess we've got jest ahead uv some trubble thet would er planted us right hyar—say, we aint quit Nihillalau anny too soon. Thar's death an' dis-as-tre a comin' ter them what stays behind. Doant ye think thet spectral army didn't mean nuttin, ner them spooks a shootin' didn't mean nuttin.' It's time we quit wen ye sees tings like thet a floatin' in that thar air."

There was a general shaking of heads in affirmation of the position that Buckskin Pete took.

"Was thar many men a fitin' thet ye seen?" timidly asked Quick Shot Al.

"Saay, Al, thar was hundreds an' hundreds uv 'em. You could hear em a swarin' and a cussin', the men wot gets theirn a groanin' en a hollerin say twas a reg'lar battle," replied Buffalo Ed.

There was some white faces after the story was told to be seen here and there in the bandit's ranks.

No man is quite so superstitious as the man of blood.

The outlaws pushed ahead at full speed and by sun-up were far away from their old haunts.

The best part of the outlaws vanished into the haze of the North-West leaving however, behind Nihillalau, the Indian, no longer a sane leader, but a mere crazy savage, surrounded by some twenty-five Indians and half-breeds as fanatically insane as he was, and quite as blood-thirsty.

Woe betide the unfortunate white that had to face these men now, as a captive.

The entire band had reverted to savagery.

The slight crust that contact with the whites had put over their savage nature was lost; they were now desperate, crafty, merciless, sly, treacherous, sneaking, devils of red men, intent only to glut themselves in carnage—and far up on the top of a peak of dangerous rocks, amid wild beasts, three men and one weak woman was all of the white race in fifty miles to cope with their desire for blood.

How would the issue, thus sharply joined, last?

Who would pass away in the attacks of Nihillalau, now more than ever The Red Terror!

CHAPTER XII.

THE ROAD AGENT OF PORCUPINE RIVER.

Boomerang Joe, loping along on a great black horse not ten miles from the stress through which Gerard

and his party were treading their perilous way, was in an evil state of mind.

Joe's occupation was that of a Road Agent.

He was known to evil haunts as *The Road Agent of Porcupine River*.

His special way of endearing himself to fame and writing his name on the tablets of memory was to "hold-up" the Fort Tanana and Fort Davidson coach which traveled between these widely divergent points every month or six weeks, or to shoot from ambush any unfortunate trapper that looked as if he had "dough" on him.

The business of a Road Agent, in "sticking-up" unfortunates and robbing them caused Boomerang Joe to be known all over bad-men's worlds, and thus had caused it to be somewhat inconvenient to frequent the places where honest people live, but this was not what Joe had thoughts of as he rode along or gave him the evil look on his face.

The fact was that a freighter's train going to Fort Davidson had got by him in spite of his watchfulness and he had "over-looked a bet" as he expressed it with many side oaths.

Intent upon getting to the bottom of his failure and with still purpose of retrieving his failure, Boomerang Joe loped along in a line by a freak of fate that brought him in due time smack up against Gerard and his party, just as it was issuing down the side of the mountain in the early dawn after a night of dangerous vigil, and was streaming out over the bottom-land in hopes of getting to the Fort Davidson trail without being again attacked by Nihillalau's gang.

Gerard saw the outlaw come loping along a fine sight with his long black hair floating in the wind, his black eyes snapping, his tall frame clad in buckskin, and his wide hat flapping in the wind.

"Halt!" cried Gerard raising his two hands in the inverted "Y" form of peace.

Boomerang Joe stopped quick.

At first the slightest motion had been made toward his guns but the sign of peace as shown by Gerard seemed to reassure him, and he sidled his horse up to Gerard's without a shade of change in his impassive face, although to a man of his ilk, the sight of a Mounted Policeman, heading a party of men looked to him like the arrest of one Boomerang Joe.

Gerard knew Joe in a moment.

Joe was too widely known in police circles not to be known.

Joe also knew Gerard.

He had fought several bouts with Gerard and had spent some time in jail as a result of the bouts.

So he was curious.

"Hello, Inspector?" Joe remarked.

"Hello, Boomerang Joe," replied Inspector Gerard Taft. "Where are you going, this nice summer morning?"

"To rob a freighter," promptly returned Joe, knowing that it would do no good to lie to the Mounted Policeman. "I was going to hold him up last night. He's loaded with a lot of merchandise going to the fort, but I missed him in the darkness. I thought I might get him over there about ten miles, for he has two Prairie Schooners, and eight hosses in his train, and he can't make the head of the Porcupine before I can head him off."

"Going cross lots to do it, eh?" said Gerard.

"Shore."

"Well, I think if I were you I wouldn't."

"No?"

"No," added Gerard. "There's nothing in it this trip. I might have to put it over you, and there you are."

"Waal," replied Joe. "You can't get to me until I've done something. I've not held up the freightery yet—see? No crime had been committed."

"I might hold you up as a 'suspicious person.'"

"No. Not out here. There's only a few towns in the U-nited States whar that thar charge goes. As if every cop on earth isn't 'suspectin' some one' and the 'suspicious person' charge has blasted the reputations of more unfortunate devils than anything else I know of."

Gerard laughed.

"You know tricks when you see them, don't you, Joe," Gerard said.

The outlaw laughed.

He beckoned to Gerard to step to one side.

"Who's the skirt?" he asked indicating Barbara with a wink.

"Sister of the big chap there."

"Sister to her? Well, he's a chump."

"Why?"

"To let his pretty sister come out here. Thar's too many gun-men and outlaws hyar ter risk a neat, likely good little skirt like thet with. I'd send her East or South, or West—any old way, but I'd not keep her out hyar. Say, some feller'll run off with her shore. She's too likely fer these hyar parts, Inspector, aint et a shame?"

Gerard thought a moment.

Then he told the entire story of the work of Nihillalau.

As he progressed Boomerang Joe's eyes snapped.

"Say," he said. "That thar loaferish thug of a bandit hez pretty near put me out o' biz up hyar. He's spoilin' the game. People is gettin' afraid ter go between Fort Davidson and Fort Tanana. Ef they cums et all they's armed ter the teeth, and say, some day I'm liable ter git shot. I've hed it in fer thet skulkin' Injun, an' say, he's alone wit his Injun companions. The white men o' his game hez quit 'im."

"How do you know that?"

"Cause I does. I met em a pintin' fer high groun' jest arter sun up. They was scart ter death. They was a piking fer high groun' led by that thar Eitelwolf. Yep, thar was the whole kit-en-ker-boodle of the whites wit Eitelwolf. I see Buckskin Pete, Quick Shot Al, Buffalo Ed an' whole lots uv gun-whites thet aint yet known ter fame havin' not yit shot up moren seven er eight folks. Yep, they tells me thet Nihillalau was crazy en they was a hittin' th' great high places tweent hear and some whar's funder No'th they's didn't eyare whar."

This was welcome news to Gerard.

But there were other things that he wanted to say to Boomerang Joe, if he was a Road-Agent.

"Say," said Gerard. "did they tell you of the queer thing we saw on the horizon, some time ago?"

"Yass," replied the outlaw with his eyes fixed upon Gerard's face with a gleam of mirth in them.

Gerard felt sure that in some way or another the outlaw knew of the mysterious army of men that at-

tacked each other amid great noise, then faded to spectral nothingness and silence.

"What do you think of it?" added Gerard.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" laughed the bandit. "Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"What are you laughing at?" queried Gerard. "Is it a laughing matter?"

"Wall, I didn't think thet ye uv all men 'ld be tooken in by any thing like thet—say, whar was ye born?"

This was all that could be got out of the outlaw.

Gerard felt sure that he knew something; but saw that it was impossible to get to the bottom of what he did know.

But there was one thing that Joe offered to do that surprised and touched him.

"Say, Inspector," said Joe, "I'm a going ter make ye an offer. Thet gal is a likely skirt. I like her looks. She didn't outer be up here in this part uv the wold an' seein' thet she's hyar they aint no call fer me ter butt in—but ef, ye wants ter double-cross thet Nihillalau I'm game ter help ye."

Gerard stared.

Whether he as an officer of the law ought to compound the many felonies he knew Joe to be guilty of flashed through his mind.

"Now Joe," Gerard said, "you know I aint squeamish but you see I'm a Mounted Policeman, and you are a gun-man, to put it to you mildly."

"Yep."

"I'm on the square, ye know."

"Shore. Thar never was a crooked man in yar force. I know ye is jest as square as they makes em."

"That being so may I consult with Constable York here, between ourselves, without there being offense taken?"

"Why suttin'ly. Thar's jest whar yer right. Wen ye gits through an makes up yar mind I'll get ter ye wit a statement o' me intershuns."

With that the outlaw jumped off his horse, lariatied it, staked it out to graze, found a rock he liked, out with a very bad smelling pipe and began to solace himself with a smoke.

Gerald called Norman over to him and briefly told him what he had been offered by Joe.

Norman listened with amusement.

"Say, Gerard," he hesitatingly asked. "You don't feel like throwing down Boomerang Joe, do you?"

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Nothing but you are so serious minded that I wouldn't be a bit surprised to have you refuse."

"You think I ought not to refuse the aid of Joe?"

"Think? Say, you'd make most any one weary."

"Thank you."

"But you would."

"Why?"

"Let me put an illustration before you."

"Go ahead."

"If you were walking along in a trail and a bandit attacked you, and you had no guns, would you hesitate to pick one up, although you knew it belonged to another bandit?"

"Of course not."

"The fact, that another gun-man owned it would not deter you from taking the weapon and fighting for your life?"

"Of course not. Don't be silly."

"Well, then in this case why should you not take up one bandit and fight him against the other. Don't be so serious. After you have put one thug out of the way it's time to take up the question of ethics. Now, run away and be good."

Gerard could not help but smile.

He called over to Boomerang Joe.

Joe slouched over to where the two policemen were talking.

"This is my side partner, Constable York," said Gerard as Joe approached.

"Pleased ter know ye. I've heern o' ye. They say thet yer a likely shot an' we gun-men had better watch out for ye."

"That's complimentary," bantered Norman. "I think, however, we will have to abstain from shootin' up each other for now we are allies. We are going to engage in a battle with Nihillalau and his gang. That's bound to give us enough shootin' to keep us satisfied for some time."

"Naw ye ain't," snapped the outlaw.

"Well, do you think that Nihillalau will sit down and tamely let you 'do' him?" amusedly questioned Norman.

"Say, I've got this game beat a mile," sneered Joe. "The skirt is safe an' we hev it all over that Red Terror, so thick thet ye kin see it a mile."

"Well, explain," remarked Gerard.

In a whisper Boomerang Joe told his plan.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Gerard when the plan broke upon him.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" roared Norman equally pleased.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" shouted Boomerang Joe. "Aint thet the slick plan? Well, I jest guess yes."

The three heads then went together and remained so while Dick Loxa, Barbara, and Silent Sol, gazed curiously at the incongruous plotters—two policemen and a Road Agent, plotting to overthrow an Indian outlaw.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ATTACK OF THE RED TERROR.

"Here's their tracks. Plain and clear do I see them. They have descended from the mountain."

These words rang clear and sharp from the lips of Nihillalau, the outlaw, now a remorseless leader of an Indian band of desperadoes.

"Where?" yelled The Tomahawk, while behind him streamed a horrid band.

The Indians had thrown away the last vestige of civilization.

They were nearly all naked to the waist having cast off their clothes in their frenzy.

They had brutally painted their bodies until they were masses of disgusting barbaric colors.

The War Feathers of three long tail-feathers from an eagle were now in every hair front, and each brave allowed his long hair to wave far behind him.

Their swarthy copper, red, and almost white faces according to their breed were shining with bear's grease.

All were now painted for war!

Each face bore longitudinal stripes of red, and yellow and black, and each savage nature was keyed up to murder and disaster, for they had spent a day in their old camp dancing *The War Dance of Death*.

After the dance the Indian warriors as they called themselves now, had started on their career of Death.

It was their creed to kill every living thing they met after the war dance had ended and they had taken the *War Trail*.

Their pathway to the foot of the mountain peak where Gerard had made his compact with Boomerang Joe, the outlaw, was along a trail of blood.

They had only met an inoffensive Indian trapper, Fort Davidson Frank, on their way, but they had slaughtered the poor fellow in their wild frenzy and left him a hacked and bleeding corpse near his traps at a beaver run in one of the small streams emptying into the Porcupine River.

The Indian's scalp was dripping from the saddle bow of Nihillalau, the thug, who crazed by his savagery, was no more than an insane Indian butting into certain death.

The outlawry of his band had been merged into an Indian uprising.

Nihillalau wore a war bonnet on his head.

He had stripped himself to the waist, painted for war, and was now a mere savage whom it would have been better to kill quick on sight, than to allow to live longer, for like the tiger, he was a noxious beast whose only place was in the clutches of death.

The Tomahawk, as the young brave who rode at the right hand of the chief was known, since the desertion of Eitelwolf, had a murderous record all over the North-West.

He was "wanted" at Athabasca for a furious and unprovoked assault on a white man, which almost ended in the death of the man.

There was a suspicion about Great Slave Lake that The Tomahawk was concerned in a vicious murder of a settler who had been "held-up" and who had tried to resist a man he said with his dying breath was "an Indian."

The Tomahawk was as wildly excited now as was Nihillalau.

As they were backed by as desperate a band of men as one could wish for, they were now a howling mob of murderous force, in hot pursuit of the two Mounted Policemen and their party.

"Take the trail," cried Nihillalau. "Don't forget to save the life of that girl. Kill the men but save her life. I want to be near as she is dying in the agony of starvation."

As the Indians with every fierce eye on the plain trail showing which way Barbara, Gerard and the party went, The Tomahawk, like Nihillalau, a mission educated Indian talked together.

"What did you learn?" asked Nihillalau.

"Much," replied The Tomahawk.

"What was it?"

"The way the girl, Barbara Loxa, escaped."

"Ah, how? Right good news will it be to me to understand. I have been puzzling over this mystery."

"Plain indeed. She was wafted into the sky!"

"Prut! You mock me. How could she be wafted into the sky? I have read of air-ships, but there are none in this territory, I am sure."

"Indeed, you are right. There are no air-ships in this territory."

"Then how could Barbara Loxa be wafted into the sky?"

"I will tell you."

"Do so at once."

"She was wafted into the sky by the aid of Gerard Taft, the Royal North-West Mounted Policeman and his friends, Silent Sol, Dick Loxa, and Constable Norman York."

"Huh?"

"Just what I've said."

"Impossible!"

"No, Nihillalau it is not impossible."

"Tell me all and quickly. You talk too slow for my hot blood."

"Twas simple. The man Gerard and all his friends ascended the peak along which your young men were camped."

"Ho! Ho! Impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible for white men, it would seem."

"You mean that they scaled the highest points of that mountain beneath which we were encamped in the night time?"

"I do."

"With no lights?"

"With none but the moon."

"Only white men could have done it. We Indians could not."

"White men are better than Indians in this kind of game, but they can die, you know, just like Indians, and it takes no more lead to kill a white man than it does an Indian."

A smile of delight swept over Nihillalau's face as he thought of this fact.

It bolstered up his waning courage.

A real Indian is a very superstitious individual and there was something about this uncanny climbing of a spot that he believed no human foot could possibly press, that had cast a feeling of fear upon the spirits of the outlaw leader.

It was the seeing of this fact that had caused The Tomahawk to point the fact out that a red man and a white man each died equally quick at the revolver's leaden summons.

Nihillalau forgot his fears.

He dashed proudly ahead only thinking of his vengeance.

"Ha!" he cried a feeling of caution suddenly sweeping over him.

"What does all this mean?" asked The Tomahawk.

"Why these starts and fears? Is my leader a coward? Is he on the war-path? Is he afraid of the whites?"

"No! No! I am not a coward. But I fear that there is something wrong here. Why are these tracks so broad? I know Gerard Taft. He is a good woodsman. Why is he leaving his trail so plain? He knows I am

on his trail. I see it was he who had himself let down into my camp, seized that girl, and was drawn up to the top of the canyon in safety by his companions—I fear that this is a ruse. There's no reason why this trail should be so plain. Gerard would not leave so plain a trail. He wants us to follow him—"

"You rave," sneered The Tomahawk.

He was a young brave on his first war path.

Things that made the wily old hound, Nihillalau, suspicious, The Tomahawk looked upon merely as suspicious circumstances pointing to the cowardice of his chief.

"Fools sneer the most when least they understand!"

The quotation might have been apropos of the speech that the chief outlaw might have made to his subordinate.

As it was it was not made, but instead, Nihillalau allowed himself to be led onward.

"This trail is alright," The Tomahawk said.

"There's no danger here. See. Here is where the girl Barbara alighted to pick wild flowers. They are sure we have been thrown off the scent and they are loitering around gaily, not trying in the slightest degree to conceal their movements."

There was every likelihood that this was correct, for there was a bunch of wild flowers alongside of the trail, fresh and unwithered, showing that they had been thrown there not long before by some idle hand. Nihillalau's eyes brightened as he saw the sight.

"My revenge seems to be coming nearer," he said.

The Tomahawk nodded.

"We will soon come up with the girl," he cried.

But for some unaccountable reason the trail was lost a few feet ahead.

The two Indians accompanied by the gang of thugs were at fault at first.

They searched on all sides but nothing could be seen of the missing trail.

"I can't understand this," muttered Nihillalau.

"Here we are in the soft bottom lands of the Porcupine River, and every track made by Barbara Loxa or any horse, or man, or even dog, in their party ought to be clear as a bell under our eyes. Yet we can see not the slightest foot prints. It is passing strange."

"I don't think so," cried The Tomahawk anxious to create a feeling against Nihillalau, for The Tomahawk was young and very ambitious. "The tracks are not faded because of any plot on the part of the party we are pursuing but because as you may see, the party have here stepped from the soft bottom land on to this long stretch of rock."

"True. But do you not see that there are no tracks on the muddy bottom land for a long while back?" asked the older man. "It looks to these eyes as if the party had halted at the bottom land, had spread blankets down until they reached the shale or rock strip and had hoped to induce us to think that the trail ended there."

The Tomahawk shook his head.

"They are near here somewhere. This is no lure," said he. "Why I feel sure we shall sight the entire white party soon. In fact I'd stake—"

A loud yell came at this point from one of the young warriors who was whirling about on his horse engaged in scouting for possible clues.

"What is that hail?" cried Nihillalau in deep interest.

The warrior came rushing back on his Indian pony.

"I have sighted the white party!" he cried.

"Where are they?" said Nihillalau and The Tomahawk together.

"Just getting a boat ready about two miles from here on the shores of the Porcupine River."

A smile of deep revenge crossed Nihillalau's face.

He raised himself in his stirrups.

"We have the white folks now," he yelled. "All who wish to see me take my revenge follow me!"

As he spoke Nihillalau dashed his horse ahead to cross the wide stretch of country that lay between him and the glutting of his vengeance.

He could see the party led by Gerard Taft just getting in a boat to float down the Porcupine River to Fort Davidson and safety.

"They shall not escape us!" cried the ferocious Indian as he sped along every member of his Indian band of outlaws trying to be the first to reach the little party of whites.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUTLAW OUTWITS OUTLAW.

"Well is this the end of your plan?" asked Gerard as Boomerang Joe halted him beneath a shady clump of trees along the shores of the Porcupine River.

"Naw. This hyar is ther beginnin'," replied Joe. "I ain't ergoin' ter tell ye more but ye are goin' ter see some fun right hyar."

Gerard looked at Norman.

Norman winked his approval of the way things were going, while the remainder of the party, part of whom were riding and part walking alighted and awaited some future order that Gerard might give.

Gerard had practically resigned the planning, however, to Boomerang Joe.

Joe had jumped into the breach with alacrity.

He had taken the party by many devious ways from the place where he had joined them.

Barbara had been accorded the honor of riding Taft's steed, and the men took turns in riding the horse of Norman, but the black brute of Joe's had so strenuously objected to being ridden by any one but his owner that he was left immune of all riders except Boomerang Joe.

Thus Silent Sol and Dick Loxa had been forced to ride "shanks mare" for much of the time.

They and Norman had "spelled" each other, however, and the result had been speedy progress after all.

"Well what next?" cried Gerard searching for some hint of the future from Boomerang Joe.

"Thar under them willows you'll find a fine flat-boat," cried the Road Agent. "Et ain't so purty lookin' but et will git ye ter Fort Davidson. By thet

thar river it's onny about twenty-eight mile--by the trail ets fifty, easy, getin' over them air canyons through witch the river runs like fun stretches out things when yar on hoss back."

"That's the first time that I knew that it was quicker to a place by a river than a road," said Norman. "Usually it's the other way."

"Wall," rejoined Joe. "Thar's a lot o' things thet young chaps like ye hez ter larn. This hyar is one of 'em. In this case ye kin get ter Fort Davidson a good deal quicker than ye kin get ter the place afoot, by goin' by the river, an' don't ye fergit it."

"That's the way fer ye to escape," added the outlaw a second later when he had laughed to himself over the success of his plan.

"Are you going with us?" asked Barbara of Joe.

"Me! I should say *not*. I'm goin' ter quit this hyar territory as soon ez me plan is pulled over. Thar's a chanst in Mexico fer gun-men they tells me an' 'tween us all I'm goin' ter take it. I'm goin' ter jump the game hyar jest as soon ez I gits ye safe in thet thar boat--oh, don't none uv ye worrit ye are safe right now."

Joe spoke in such a confident tone that Barbara began to breathe a great deal freer.

"There's one thing I'd like to ask," said Gerard.

"What was the scene of fighting I've seen here some time ago, plainly shown on the horizon?"

"A meer-age!" cried Joe.

The cat was out of the bag.

Gerard stared.

Then he broke into a great horse-laugh.

"What did Joe say?" anxiously asked Norman.

"He said that what we saw of fighting men, of armies shooting at one another was certainly only one of the *mirages* sometimes seen in this country--and which appear to give you scenes which really are not what they seem."

"What's a *mirage*?" asked Barbara who had overheard the conversation.

"It's an optical phenomenon, produced by refraction," said Gerard. "The usual elevation or apparent approximation of coasts, mountains, ships, and other objects, to quote from my old school-books, has long been known under the name of *looming*. If this same phenomenon is accompanied by inverted images, it is called a *mirage*. The *mirage* is frequently observed on the surface of the sea by sailors, and on dry sandy plains such as those of Egypt, and where they were frequently seen by the French army under Napoleon I, during his campaign in that country."

"What makes it?" asked Silent Sol.

"It is said that whenever the surface of the earth is overheated in these, and other latitudes, it communicates a portion of its caloric, to the superincumbent layer of air which thus becomes less dense than the superior layers. The rays of light which proceed from an object in the heated layer will then be bent downward, and thus arrive at the end in such a direction as to cause the object to appear above its actual appearance. Thus a traveller sees a *mirage* of a lake, he hurries toward it only to have it recede from him, as by approaching it, he changes the angle of direction of the rays which enter his eye."

Silent Sol had been hanging on to everything that Gerard said with his eyes and mouth open.

"It is the finest thing I ever heard. It is," he said after Gerard had stopped. "They told me oncet that a man could go to colledge in them English countries far over the sea and that he could talk after a squirt of colligin' had been administered to him, so that no one could understand it. I didn't believe it. By Hokey, I didn't. I do know for I don't know what Gerard was talking about. I didn't understand one single word."

The laugh that followed awoke the echoes.

"Well to me it wasn't much clearer than mud," cried Norman.

"It ought to be clear," said Gerard. "I learned it once just like that out of an encyclopedia, but stripped of all its mystic words it means that under certain conditions the horizon *reflects* scenes many miles off, hundreds, mayhap thousands, so that they appear to be right near you. In this case we saw a *mirage* that may have been reflected for miles away, where there was possibly a sham battle going on, for no country is now at war that would have had so many troops engaged, don't you know?"

"Waal that sounds O. K.," chipped in Silent Sol. "I'll stand for something you have said because you have whittled them down to my feeble very common-people comprehension. I think I get you a little now. You seem to have some lucid and rational streaks in what you said. I can understand that a cloud might reflect something a good ways off so that a chap standing where we are would think the scene was right near him. I'm willing to admit that this *meringue*—"

"No, no," said Barbara, "*mirage*."

"Well have it your own way" added Sol. "Only I'd rather eat a good *meringue* pie than the best *mirage* I ever saw—but what I meant to say was that I'd stand for the *mirage* but how about the shrieks and groans of the wounded—the what in the name of the foul fiend is that?"

Right behind him came again those dreadful shrieks.

The cries of dying men, the squeals of horses, punctured by cannon balls, the shouts of men urging on fighting soldiers seemed to ring in his ears.

Silent Sol gasped as he whirled around.

There stood Boomerang Joe playing a *Scotch bag-pipe*.

"I found them pipes over ter a pawn-shop in Fort Davidson," explained Joe. "I'm learning to play on them an' plobably wen ye was a seein' thet thar mee-rage, I was a playing them pipes ter larn some o' them Scotch tunes an' ye thot I was an' army a dyin' with many weounds—what?"

The roar of laughter that saluted Joe could be heard half a mile.

"Joe, it's lucky you are fifty miles or so from any other human being when you do your practicing," remarked Gerard dryly.

"There's a lot of people that I would like to send tickets to Joe's orchestra," added Barbara thinking of the days of horror she used to suffer in "The States," as the United States of America are called in the North-West, listening to some infantile wonder practice scales.

A ripple of amusement went around the party.

All had lived near some infant wonder.

All had suffered.

"I'm a calm man, not given to deeds of blood," said Gerard in his deepest voice. "But if *I could* meet the man who first invented the piano alone on a dark night, I'm afraid that there would be a shootin-up."

"There's going to be one right quick here," dryly put in Norman. "If my eyes do not deceive me I see friend Nihillalau coming lickety-split on a most comprehensive horse, for the purpose of doing a trifle of plain and fancy shooting up on his own account."

The entire party save Boomerang Joe jumped up determined to get ready to meet the terrible Indian.

He could be seen coming at high speed followed by at least a dozen of his fellows.

"Get up, Joe, we must get to cover!" cried Gerard.

"Get nowhar," said Joe.

"Man!" yelled Norman, "don't you see that Nihillalau will soon be here? He will murder us all!"

"Nary murder," said Joe sleepily.

"Joe, wake up are you crazy?" cried Silent Sol.

"Naw. Jest wait a minuet—thar ye are!" cried Joe.

With his words the party saw Nihillalau's horse take a long plunging roll and hurl the Indian over on his head directly in front of his plunging steed.

Around him fell others of his bloodthirsty band.

The Tomahawk was seen to try to get off his horse which was plunging here and there as if in terrible desperation.

Others in the band were floundering hither and thither.

Spellbound all watched.

Slowly while they looked, horses and Indians disappeared beneath the surface of the ground, engulfed in the living tomb that Nihillalau had designed in another form for Barbara Loxa, who spellbound, saw her tormentor disappear beneath the surface of a terrible stretch of quicksand forever. Not a soul of all the Indian ruffians were saved. They died miserably.

Gerard was the first to recover.

"The Indians are dead in that vast bed of quicksand!" he cried. "Boomerang Joe knew what he was about. Hey Joe—"

But Joe was now almost a speck on the distant horizon.

He started for Mexico when he saw that he had beaten his old enemy Nihillalau, and had utterly destroyed him, and his entire outlaw band.

Gerard gasped.

He turned toward the flat-boat on which he saw that Silent Sol was leading the horses of the party and that every one was aboard the boat awaiting him.

"A-l-l a-b-o-a-r-d, for Fort Davidson-n," yelled Norman. "Through by water route. Hurrah!" yelled Norman.

"Cast off!" cried Gerard as he nimbly jumped aboard and felt the craft start away for its haven of peace, and plenty.

THE END.

The next issue will be "American Indian Weekly No. 21" entitled: "The Fur Trader's Discovery" or "The Brotherhood of Thieves."

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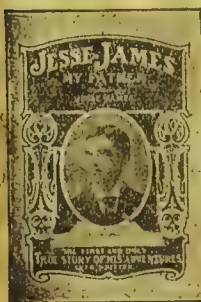
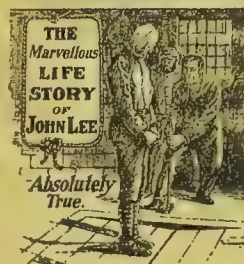
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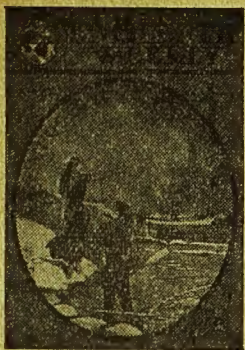


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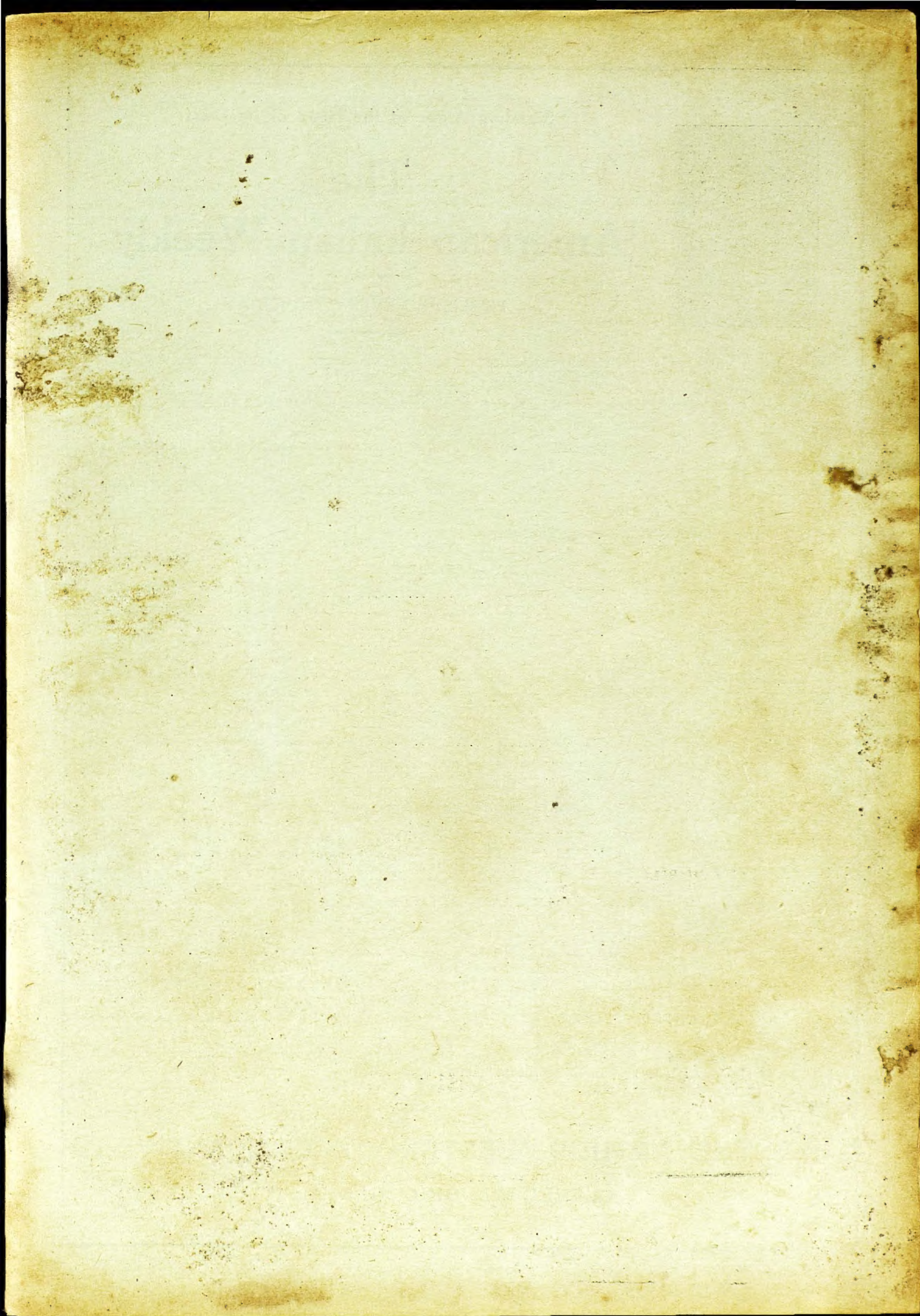
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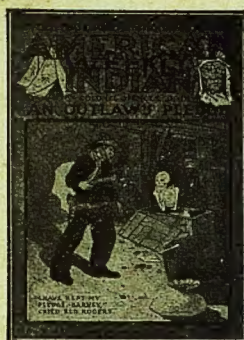
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| No. 2. | TRACKED TO HIS LAIR | or The Pursuit of the Midnight Raider |
| No. 3. | THE BLACK DEATH | or The Curse of the Navajo Witch |
| No. 4. | THE SQUAW MAN'S REVENGE | or Kidnapped by the Piutes |
| No. 5. | TRAPPED BY THE CREES | or Tricked by a Renegade Scout |
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| No. 9. | THE DECOY MESSAGE | or The Ruse of the Border Jumpers |
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| No. 12. | LURED BY OUTLAWS | or The Mounted Ranger's Desperate Ride |

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| March | 2—No. 14. | THE TRAGEDY OF HANGMAN'S GULCH..... | or The Ghost of Horn Mountains |
| March | 9—No. 15. | THE TREASURES OF MacKENZIE ISLES..... | or The Outlaw's Drag-Net |
| March | 16—No. 16. | HELD UP AT SNAKE BASIN..... | or The Renegade's Death-Vote |
| March | 23—No. 17. | THE MAIL RIDER'S DASH WITH DEATH..... | or The Desperado of Poker Flat |
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